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PLUS

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ISSUE 66 // £5.49



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ISSUE 66 // APRIL 2020

MEET THE TEAM



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Long-term LEGO fan specialising in everything from Pirates to Star Wars, with a soft spot for exhibitions and LEGOLAND.



ASSOCIATE EDITOR / CHRIS WHARFE

Experienced journalist with a lifelong love of LEGO, Star Wars and Super Heroes. Blocks' resident northerner.



BUILD SPECIALIST / SIMON PICKARD

Our experienced MOC expert who is a regular on the show circuit. If there's a way to build it, then he can show you how.



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Lifelong LEGO obsessive passionate about collecting. With a thorough knowledge of LEGO over the years, he is Blocks' historian.

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WELCOME





Cover Pic: Phil Wrighton

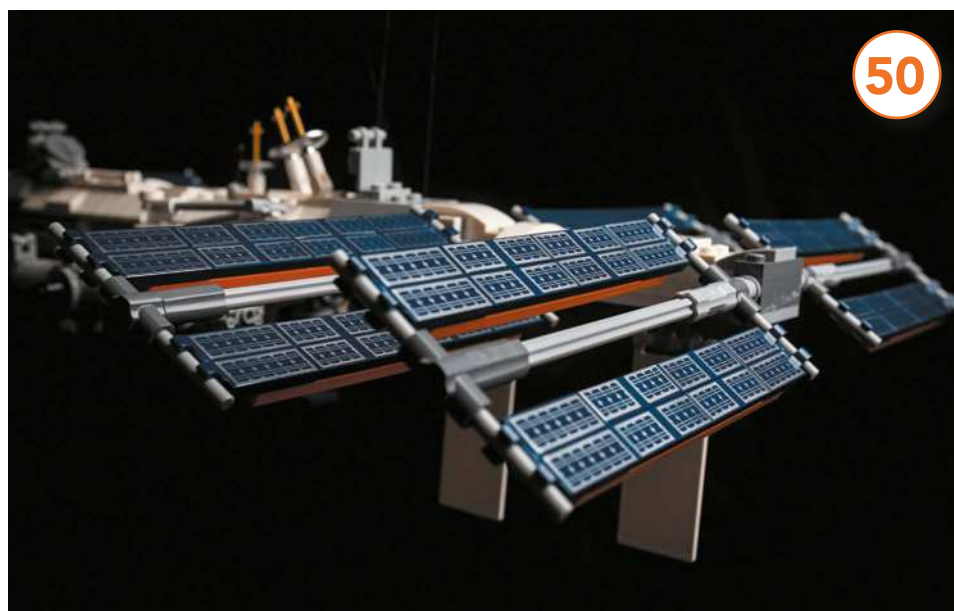
Building X-wings, Batmobiles and magical castles is always good fun, but there's something really special about putting together a real-life object out of LEGO bricks. And when that object has been to space? It's a no-brainer. That possibly explains all the real-life space sets we've been seeing come out of Billund over the past few years, and it definitely explains why we've devoted this month's cover to the International Space Station.

You can check out our verdict on the latest Ideas set over on page 50, but our celebration of modern LEGO space travel doesn't stop there. On page 16, we've charted a course through the stars to remember three decades of the LEGO Group and NASA working together, and on page 18, you'll find a countdown of the best real-life space sets – including a couple of curveballs.

If space isn't your thing, don't worry: as you'll quickly discover, we've got plenty of Earthbound exploration too. You can find out how to join a thriving community of LEGO photographers on Instagram on page 30, follow Daniel's latest UCS Star Destroyer interior guide on page 74, and see Graham flex his building skills on page 111. Enjoy the issue.

Chris Wharfe
Associate Editor

 **WE'VE
CHARTED A
COURSE
THROUGH
THE STARS** 



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12 ISSUES FOR THE PRICE OF 11
SEE PAGE 60 FOR DETAILS...



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WIN WIN WIN WIN WIN!

Subscribe to Blocks magazine today to be in with a chance of winning **21321 International Space Station**! You'll also be automatically entered into our bi-monthly prize draws to win the latest and greatest LEGO sets. See page 73 now!



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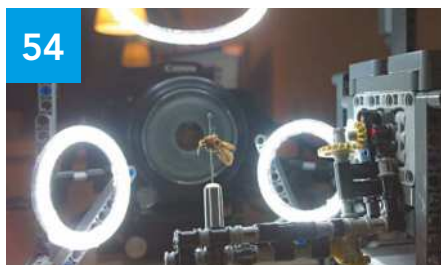
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LEGOtalk

Rounding up the brick conversation each month.
E-mail graham@blocksmag.com to share your views

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STAR LETTER

HI BLOCKS MAGAZINE, I'd like to show you my latest LEGO creation, and share some thoughts about creativity.

I think creativity is not necessarily about coming up with new things. Usually combining existing ideas will work just as well. In this case I've combined a space set with Jurassic Park characters and assets/props. Instead of using a raptor from one of the official LEGO Jurassic World sets, I put in a 'space raptor', which seems more fitting. It seems even in space poor Lex and Tim are not safe from being stalked by velociraptors...

Another lesson I've learned about creativity is that perfection is not achieved when there is nothing more to add, but when there is nothing left to take away. Other than that, for this image, I tried to create an interesting composition, which was challenging because those little faces needed to line up with the windows perfectly. I like creating depth by putting something (preferably big and somewhat blurry) in the foreground, so in this case it's a blob of jelly-putting.

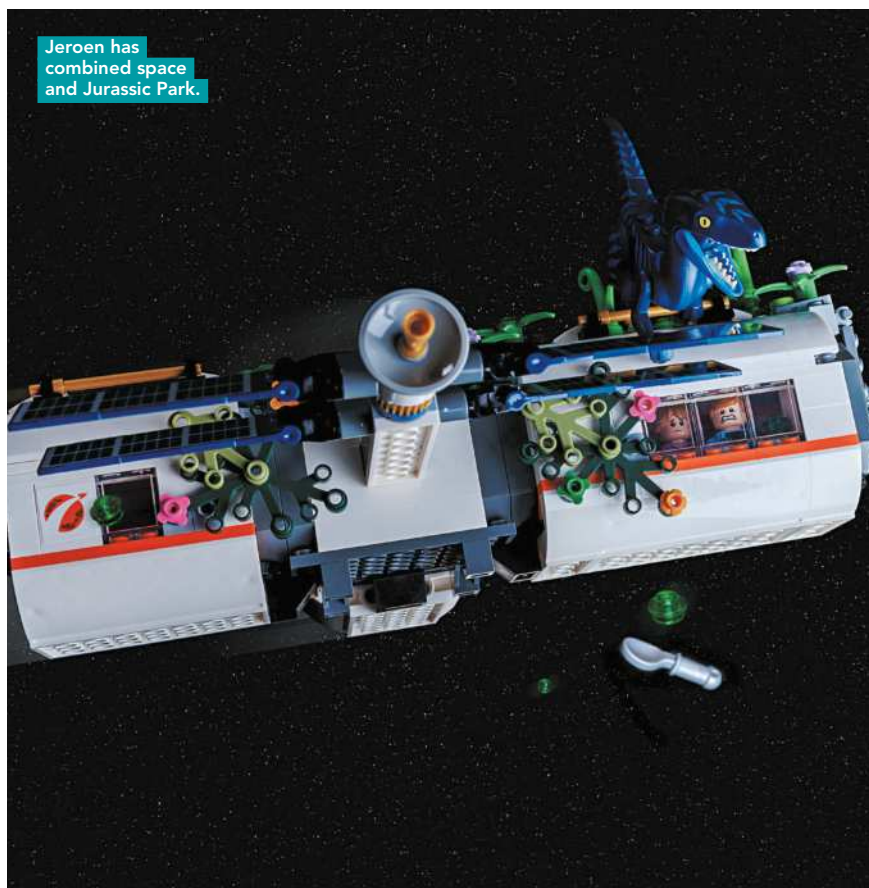
What I really like about the magazine is the positive vibes that radiate from it. I ended my dark ages when I wanted to do some creative projects again and LEGO just happened to be the right medium for it. LEGO parts are all predefined, but not too much, striking a perfect balance between rigidity and flexibility. The nostalgia is an extra bonus. Now I'm also feeling the positive vibes of the AFOL community through your magazine, even though I never met anyone in person.

Jeroen Rinkel
(Netherlands)

What a fantastic build Jeroen, it's a really fun mash-up. Poor Lex and Tim can't catch a break! – Graham

Have you found any fun LEGO mash-ups that spark your own creativity? Send your builds to graham@blocksmag.com

Jeroen has combined space and Jurassic Park.



INSTAGRAM SPOTLIGHT

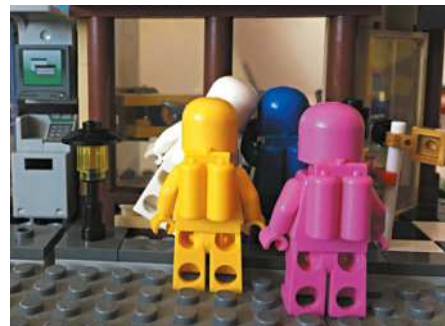


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@LEGO_FOR_MY_EGO



READER REACTIONS

STRING SUGGESTIONS

When a reader asks a difficult question with no single answer, it's time to ask the Blocks community for their tips!

SOMETHING THAT'S BUGGED me for as long as I can remember is the winches in LEGO sets. Specifically the string, and there are three reasons why. One – most children don't know how to tie knots. Two – even if you can, it always ends up sticking out the other end, which never looks good. Three – there is a similar piece with studs on each end that I think would make this whole problem null and void, but LEGO continues to use this frustrating technique. What are your thoughts on this?

Peter Allen

You may lose some of the length of string, but tie a couple of knots in the end so the knot is big enough so it doesn't come back through.

Aaron Wilson

I try to get the string to go down one of the grooves in the axle – the friction alone is enough to hold it, and you only lose a couple of centimetres in length.

David Bethell

■ ■ I PULL THE STRING THROUGH A BIT FURTHER THAN IN THE PICTURE, SO WHEN I PUSH THE PIN THROUGH IT'S REALLY SECURE AS IT JAMS ON BOTH SIDES ■ ■

KIRSTY MICHAEL CURRIE MORRISON

■ ■ WHAT YOU SEE IN THE PICTURE, AND THEN I PUT A FIGURE-8 KNOT AT THE END TO PREVENT THE STRING COMING OUT ■ ■

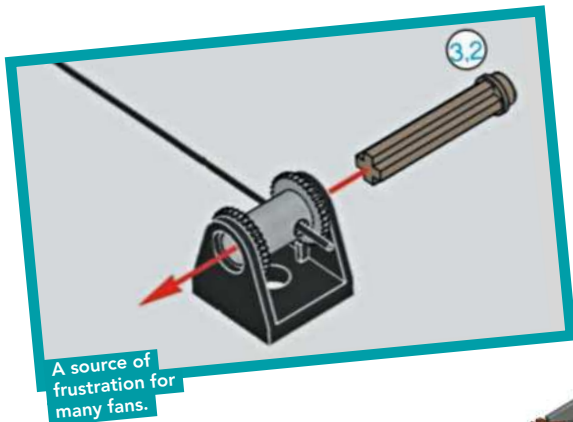
RONALD VALLENDUUK

■ ■ TIE A SLIP KNOT AROUND THE LONG END AND PULL THE LOOP TAUT TO THE BARREL OF THE WINCH ■ ■

TOM GOSLING

■ ■ I'VE ALWAYS HAD THE PROBLEM WHERE THE KNOT TIGHTENS UP AND BECOMES SMALLER THAN THE HOLE ■ ■

JOHN STRYKER



We always tie it off. My daughter and I play hard with LEGO and if we don't tie the string it will eventually come undone.

BrainyBricks

Many sets use the string and winch combo.



CREATOR CAR COURTS CONTROVERSY

The LEGO Group's latest Creator Expert car has once again prompted backlash from the Ideas community



THE FIAT 500 has joined the ranks of Creator Expert cars, but it's done so amid a fresh wave of Ideas-related controversy.

Felix Stiessen and Gabriele Zannotti racked up 10,000 votes for their own Fiat 500F on the crowdsourcing platform in August 2018, only for the LEGO Group to announce six months later that it had not been approved for production. Just over a year on, the company has now released its own version of the exact same car. For many fans, the timing is more than a little curious.

This isn't the first time a LEGO set has launched not long after an Ideas set has reached the magic number, but just like on those occasions, the Danish company has once again dismissed it as pure coincidence.

'It's important for us to reiterate that when basing [your] designs on existing intellectual properties (vehicles, buildings, movies, etc.) or other objects in existence in the real world, the likelihood of someone else around the world, including in this case a LEGO Designer/Design team, having thought of a similar idea has the potential to exist,' LEGO Ideas Engagement Manager Hasan Jensen said in a statement.

'Such is the nature of a creative medium such as the LEGO building system and such is this instance, where the LEGO Creator Expert team has developed the set independently.'

Just like Felix and Gabriele's Ideas submission, 10271 Fiat 500 is based on

■ ■ THE LIKELIHOOD OF SOMEONE ELSE AROUND THE WORLD HAVING THOUGHT OF A SIMILAR IDEA HAS THE POTENTIAL TO EXIST. SUCH IS THIS INSTANCE ■ ■

the iconic F model of the Italian car from 1965. Where theirs was built in bright red, though, the 960-piece official version comes in cool yellow – a colour choice that required plenty of brand new element recolours, according to the set's designer, Pierre Normandin. But the Fiat is more iconic for its contouring body than its colour scheme, and that apparently proved a tricky thing to get right.

'It was a challenge to build the right shape for the Fiat because as you can imagine, it has curves, it has rounded angles,' Pierre said in a designer video accompanying the set's announcement. 'Those were tricky to get, especially when we deal with LEGO pieces, which are quite often square and at right angles.'

Pierre also highlighted the set's functions, of which there appear to be plenty – even if steering isn't among them. 'We have a foldable roof, we have an opening trunk in the front to show off the extra wheel and then we have the engine hatch in the back,' he explained. 'The accessory we chose to go with it is a painting with a paintbrush, a colour palette and little suitcase, so we're imagining it is an artist that owns the Fiat and went to paint the Colosseum in Rome.'

We'll take a closer look at just how well Pierre achieved both the Fiat's functions and form in our review next issue.



10272 Fiat 500 is available now.

The LEGO Group's also created some retro poster designs.

REBIRTH THROUGH IDEAS

Two long-dormant themes are about to return to the LEGO line-up

Pics: Ben Alder, Clemens Fiedler

TWO MORE LEGO Ideas projects have been given the green light by the design team in Billund, and they're bringing back some long-forgotten themes. Ben Alder's Winnie the Pooh House – which you might recognise from Issue 57's Ideas Showcase – calls back to the LEGO Group's second ever licence, taking the traditionally DUPLO character into System territory.

'When I heard the news that my little LEGO creation was going to be made I genuinely could not believe it!' Ben told Blocks. 'I am so excited. I still can't believe that it's actually going to happen. It has certainly made both

mine and my little family's dream come true. I am so grateful to each and every single person that took the time to support it and has left us

I AM SO EXCITED. I STILL CAN'T BELIEVE THAT IT'S ACTUALLY GOING TO HAPPEN

a lovely comment.'

Clemens Fiedler's Medieval Blacksmith is also to be transformed into an official set, which should be music to the ears of Castle fans.

Much like Pirates, the classic theme has fallen by the wayside in the wider LEGO portfolio, but will now be revisited in an enormously detailed model – in this case, by LEGO designers Austin Carlson and Wes Talbot.

Jason Allemann's Pursuit of Flight, Andrew Clark's Thunderbirds Are Go and Stephan Niks' Anatomini were among the nine other projects unfortunately left on the Ideas cutting room floor. But with the LEGO Ideas slate now up to five future sets, including the previously-announced Playable Piano, Sesame Street and Pirate Bay, there's plenty to keep fans of the theme occupied over the next year or so.



■ EYE ON EXCLUSIVES // 853990 EASTER BUNNY HOUSE

The latest seasonal set is an egg-cellent Easter scene, including a chicken coop, moped and bunny costume minifigure. The fried egg headlight is a cracking part usage, proving the LEGO designers know their job is no yolk. You'll find it in LEGO Stores for £6.99/\$7.99.



■ MINIFIGURE OF THE MONTH // CLASSIC POLICEMAN

The creator of the original minifigure, Jens Nygaard Knudsen, sadly passed away in February at 78 years old. The classic policeman was among the very first minifigures Jens designed, and first arrived on shelves in 1978.

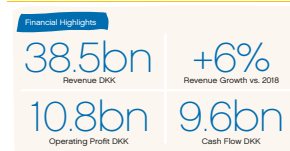
FIVE THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT...

THE LEGO GROUP'S FINANCIAL HEALTH

We dig into the latest round of annual results and bring you the headlines

1. THINGS ARE ON THE UP.

Compared to 2018, last year saw the LEGO Group's revenue grow by 6%, consumer sales grow by 5.6%, operating profit grow by 1%, and net profit grow by 3%. Those single-digit growth numbers don't sound all that impressive on their own, but in the context of the past couple of years, they're more positive: 2018 was a year of stabilisation, following a slide in 2017 that led to the dismissal of 8% of the company's workforce, and profits dropped in the first half of 2019 due to increased investment in long-term growth.



strong double-digits' will show up in a LEGO financial report. The company continued to expand into its biggest growth market in 2019, bringing its total number of retail stores to 140 across 35 cities. It won't let up this year, either, with 80 more stores planned

so far. Meanwhile, the LEGO Group will also open its first office in India in 2020, as it sets its sights on even greater market expansion.

4. THE LEGO GROUP'S PERFORMANCE IS AN ANOMALY.

'It was a strong year where we outperformed the toy industry and grew consumer sales and market share in all our largest markets,' said the company's CEO, Niels B. Christiansen. 'Our industry, like many others, is being redrawn by digitalisation and global socio-economic shifts. We're leveraging our strong financial foundation to invest in initiatives that will allow us to keep ahead of these trends and enable growth in the long term.'

5. CORE PRODUCTS ARE STILL TOP DOG.

The LEGO Group's best-selling themes in 2019 were CITY, Creator, Classic, Friends, Technic, and Star Wars, while the report also highlights Harry Potter, Marvel and Disney Princess as particularly successful themes. The company is apparently 'satisfied' with the performance of the newly-launched augmented reality theme Hidden Side, according to Christiansen.

2. THE FUTURE'S BRIGHT.

The 2019 financial report is big on words like 'investment' and 'innovation', as the company seeks to secure its future growth potential. Among the highlights are Rebuild the World (its first global ad campaign in three decades), the acquisition of secondary online marketplace BrickLink, the opening of 150 new LEGO branded stores, a revamped LEGO.com – which enjoyed a subsequent 27% increase in traffic – and a continued focus on sustainability.

3. CHINA'S LEADING THE WAY FOR MARKET EXPANSION.

No matter what's happening elsewhere in the world, you can basically guarantee the phrase 'China grew

NEWS IN BRIEF

■ IT'S-A ME, LEGO!

Nintendo has announced it's collaborating with TLG for a Super Mario range. Details are light at the time of writing, but an accompanying video teased a strangely-proportioned figure of the famous plumber with a screen on its chest.

■ CMF EQUALITY

By the time you read this, Series 20 of the Collectible Minifigures will have been revealed proper, after mistakenly being shown off early at New York Toy Fair. Among the 16 new characters are a Llama Costume Girl, Pea Suit Girl, Knight and Rocket Boy. It's the first CMF series with a 50/50 male/female split.

■ COUNCIL CONFLICT

A LEGO workshop ended in controversy after Labour councillors in Walsall complained about the 'patronising' session, which was organised by Conservative Council Leader Mike Bird. 'I'm sure the taxpayers will be furious to know councillors [were] sitting there playing with LEGO,' Labour councillor Matt Ward told Birmingham Live.

■ LEGO RAMPS

German wheelchair user Rita Ebel has spearheaded an initiative in her hometown of Hanau to install LEGO wheelchair ramps. So far, 12 ramps have been installed across the town, and the instructions have been made available online, in hopes other towns will take up the initiative.





HOT TOPIC

Blocks staffers debate the big bulletins



This month: the LEGO Group has been testing the waters for lighting kits with Night Mode at LEGO World Copenhagen



Graham **Hancock**

■ ■ ■ IF KITS WERE MORE GENERIC, THEY WOULD HAVE BETTER VALUE ■ ■ ■

Official LEGO lighting products sound like a great idea. My concern is that by making them bespoke for certain sets, as the mock-up versions are, it puts a huge limitation on how they can be used. If collectors have spent £100 or so on a modular building, it is a tough ask for another £40 just to have it light up. If the kits were more generic though, offering lights and the necessary wiring, they would have better value as they could be used for whatever model someone happens to have on display. It would also provide the opportunity for creative builders to use them in their own models rather than only official sets. I would love to see a more flexible approach to LEGO lights and hope that if the set-specific releases do come to pass, they are released alongside a more generic 'light anything' kit to provide fans with options.



Daniel **Konstanski**

■ ■ ■ IT'S GOING TO BE A REAL BLOW TO THIRD-PARTY SELLERS ■ ■ ■

Every year at conventions I see vendors selling light kits, and they look awesome. I have bought several packs, and been extremely pleased with the results. It was a great little market for these vendors – a chance to do something that really enhanced official products, while not infringing on any copyrights, or having to recoup expensive pad printing costs. In short, it was a great niche market and I was happy to give those sellers my money. I apparently wasn't the only one, and the LEGO Group has now set its sights on cornering this market with Night Mode. While I'm sure the end result will be as good as or better than those kits I have bought through the years, it's going to be a real blow to those sellers. This seems like a segment of the third-party market that the LEGO Group could have left alone – it's a shame it will now likely wither and die.



Chris **Wharfe**

■ ■ ■ INNOVATION IS WHAT THE LEGO LIGHTING MARKET NEEDS ■ ■ ■

I've tried out a couple of different third-party lighting solutions over the years, and while the results have always looked great, I'm always turned off by just how fiddly they are. The LEGO Group's test kits on display at LEGO World Copenhagen in February used Light My Bricks' lighting solutions, which fall squarely into that 'cool but awkward' category. If this is what an official LEGO lighting setup will look like, count me out. But I'm hoping that these early mock-ups were more of a proof of concept, and if the LEGO Group actually goes down this road, it does so by teaming up with a company like i-Brix, which offers wireless lighting solutions. That kind of innovation is exactly what the LEGO lighting market needs, and combining i-Brix's tech with the LEGO Group's resources could reap major rewards for all involved. Except, you know, other third-party companies.



Pic courtesy of Brickset.



10260 Downtown Diner, illuminated by Light My Bricks.

**■ BLOCKS BOOKS // MAGICAL TREASURY**

The resurgent Harry Potter theme is getting its own tie-in Visual Dictionary, complete with a behind-the-scenes look from the design team. Most excitingly, though, the book will debut in September with a brand new Tom Riddle minifigure bundled in.

■ RUMOUR MILL // RETURN OF THE CLONES

Now that the sequel trilogy is out of the way, the LEGO Star Wars design team is reportedly reverting to its tried-and-tested method of pumping out Jedi Starfighters. Anakin's yellow ETA-2 Interceptor is rumoured to be on the way this summer, as part of a larger wave dedicated to The Clone Wars.

YELLOW FEVER

Love them or hate them, the Minions are coming. Here's your first glimpse at the yellow fellows in LEGO form

IT'S BEEN 10 long months since news of LEGO Minions first broke, and most of us are still scratching our heads over the 'why'. For now, though, we've at least got the 'what', because the yellow goons made their brick debut at New York Toy Fair in February. And in doing so, they've checked off another box in their crusade for world domination.

For a while in the 2010s, the Minions were ubiquitous: plastered over your Facebook feed, decorating your Amazon packages, or if you live in the unfortunately-named small Cornish town of Minions, covering your street signs and hanging out at your local pub. Now, the pervasive pill-shaped oddities are back in Minions: The Rise of Gru, with five LEGO sets tying in to this summer's biggest animated blockbuster.

The wave of models ranges from 4+ kits all the way to large-scale buildable Minions, but the constant across the entire theme is the Minion characters themselves. As many predicted, the LEGO Group has

come up with a few specially-moulded elements for their heads and bodies – making them distinctive not only from regular minifigures, but from each other, too.

Chinese New Year collectors will be happy to see 75550 Minions Kung Fu Battle, which borrows plenty of architectural cues from that subtheme of sets. And the 876-piece 75551 Brick-Built Minions and Their Lair gives you the bricks to construct two (of a possible three) of the characters simultaneously, so you'll only have to buy one and a half sets to get the most out of it. We're sure the LEGO Group will offer that as an option when the sets launch on April 27.

This set takes the award for most bananas, literally speaking.

**NEWS IN BRIEF****■ D-0 OR BUST**

At least three new LEGO Star Wars sets will be arriving on shelves very soon, including a brick-built D-0 droid from The Rise of Skywalker, and the long-rumoured busts (which are really just helmets) of Boba Fett and a Stormtrooper.

■ XMAS HOUSE

Tickets for the annual LEGO House Christmas lunch – which takes place on December 11 this year – are now on sale. Here's hoping the afterhours event doesn't fall victim to coronavirus fears, as happened to March's 'AFOL turned LEGO designer' evening. We're sure the global panic will have calmed down by December...

■ TOP TECHNIC TEASE

Top Gear's racing mascot The Stig broke into the LEGO House recently, but it was only to promote 42109 App-Controlled Top Gear Rally Car – dashing any lingering hopes of another Technic set inspired by the show. For now, anyway...

■ BRICK GPS

Author Michael Bond says playing with LEGO helps develop navigation skills, which explains the supposed gender divide in that arena – because boys are more likely to play with the bricks. 'It's a historical, institutional bias or societal belief system that assigns different roles to girls and boys as they grow up,' he claimed in his new book, Wayfinding: The Art and Science of How we Find and Lose Our Way.



THE Blocks CONVERSATION

We shoot the brick breeze with prominent AFOLs. This month, YouTuber **just2good** talks the benefit of baseplates, and missing out on Monster Fighters

What's the first LEGO set you remember building?

While they certainly weren't the first LEGO sets I had, as my LEGO experience came from building with my brother from his collection, I remember the first sets I owned myself were 6470 Mini Dump Truck and 6586 Polar Scout.

Did you have a dark age?

Once, from August 2010 to November 2011, but other than that I've been into LEGO just about my whole life.

What's the most versatile LEGO element you own, in your opinion?

Baseplates. These are also my favourite non-minifigure pieces. They're always the start of something special.

If you could resurrect one theme, what would it be?

Licensed? The Simpsons. Original? Adventurers. There's so many possibilities.

What's your 'one that got away'?

That kick-butt Haunted House Monster Fighters set from 2012. I love cheesy spooky stuff, I love houses, and it was the ultimate set for both of that. I'm full of regret to this day, I wish I had the money I could spend on it now, then.

What are you building right now?

I'm supposed to be building the International Space Station. It's long overdue. Don't tell the LEGO Group...

What's the most recent set you bought? What did you think of it?

Hmm, I recently have been on an eBay splurge so I've bought too many sets to keep track of. But there's some really cool sets I've admired my whole life, like 7018 Viking Ship challenges

the Midgard Serpent, which I was able to snag for a steal!

What's top of your to-buy list?

I got just about all of the new 2020 sets I

BASEPLATES ARE ALWAYS THE START OF SOMETHING SPECIAL

wanted, but I've been keeping an eye out for the new Black Widow set, which should be hitting stores now.

What's your ultimate dream build/MOC?

I want to make an amusement park out of all the amusement-themed sets the LEGO Group has put out recently!



A recent acquisition. We approve.



just2good's first LEGO sets.



The one that got away.



■ POLY-AMOROUS // 30550 EASTER BUNNY

The LEGO Group is going big on Easter this year, and that includes a brand new bunny polybag. The cute yellow critter makes fun use of a white pentagonal tile, but the colourful egg requires a real stretch of the imagination.

■ RUMOUR MILL // GHOSTBUSTERS: AFTERLIFE

Word has it that we might be seeing another incarnation of the classic Ecto-1 for the upcoming Ghostbusters: Afterlife movie. That would mark the third LEGO iteration, following 2014's Ideas set and 2016's version inspired by the all-female reboot.

VERDICT

LEGO LEGACY: HEROES UNBOXED

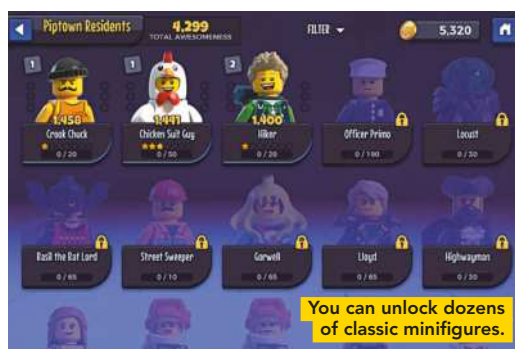
Gameloft's long-awaited mobile LEGO game is finally here – but will the virtual bricks click into place?

IF YOU'VE PLAYED DC Legends: Battle for Justice, MARVEL Strike Force or Star Wars: Galaxy of Heroes, you'll probably know what to expect from LEGO Legacy: Heroes Unboxed. Like those mobile games, it involves collecting well-known characters, levelling them up, and pitting them against each other in turn-based battles. And that means while it's ostensibly free to play, there are also plenty of in-app purchases ready to rob you of your cash.

The LEGO spin on the formula offers a couple of unique elements, including the ability to collect and build official sets to give your squads a boost. And there's no denying the theme comes through brilliantly, with classic and modern LEGO minifigures represented in equal measure. You'll be able to juggle the abilities and move sets of Captain Redbeard, Majisto, the Collectible Minifigures' Chicken Suit Guy and plenty more.

Doing so requires a serious commitment of both your time and attention, though, because Gameloft hasn't watered down the experience of this style of game at all. Daily login bonuses encourage you to play day in, day out, while ability sets are complicated combos of damage, assists, taunts, debuffs and more, each with a seemingly random percentage level (inflicting 100% damage doesn't defeat an enemy – that would be too easy).

Making the most of your team of unlocked characters involves dissecting this seemingly impenetrable wall of information, but if you're happy to do so – and the success of similar games proves plenty of people are – it allows for some satisfying synergies. And when you've cracked your best squads, you'll be



able to take them through a sizeable campaign, fight online in asynchronous multiplayer, and compete in regular events and challenges.

It's all par for the course for these games, and that means progress is painfully slow – unless you pony up. Forking over real money (up to £99.99 in one go) nets you gems, just one of multiple currencies in the game, and the one that allows you to buy your way to better and newer characters. But even that path often involves rolling the metaphorical dice on random loot boxes, hoping to gain the specific parts you need to unlock a certain minifigure.

If you already know what you're getting into with LEGO Legacy, then you'll probably enjoy the brick-based skin on the tried and tested formula. And, of course, you don't need to pay anything to play it – as long as you're prepared for the grind. But that doesn't mean the whole concept isn't still ridiculously predatory, particularly as it's aimed first and foremost at kids, and it's a shame to see the LEGO brand licensed out this way.



NEWS IN BRIEF

■ GOOD GUY LEGO

The LEGO Group has been voted the world's most reputable company, according to the Reputation Institute's annual RepTrak 100 survey, which polls more than 80,000 people across 15 different countries. It's the 10th year in a row that the company has made the list, but the first time it's taken pole position.

■ MASTERS SUCCESS

LEGO MASTERS USA has been a ratings hit for Fox, and in turn its production company Endemol Shine, which is no stranger to reality TV. 'It's like being a television anthropologist,' Endemol's Sharon Levy told Variety. 'We get to parachute into these different cultures and take a look at what's happening. It's never boring.'

■ RETIRING CREATIVITY

It's your last chance to pick up the LEGO House exclusive model 4000026 Tree of Creativity, which is currently being phased out to make way for a brand new set debuting in May.

■ NYTF REVEALS

Issue 65's Toy Fair round-up went to print just before the New York show, but it had some big reveals for us. Alongside the long-awaited Razer Crest to tie into The Mandalorian (complete with LEGO Baby Yoda), the LEGO Group unveiled yet another Spider-Man vs. Venom set, with the symbiote taking on the form of a T. rex.

LEGO IN SPACE

The International Space Station is just the latest in a long line of LEGO and NASA crossovers. We chart the coming together of two great organisations

1990s

The LEGO Group and NASA kick-start decades of collaboration with the FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) Robotics Competition. The annual event will go on to spawn the FIRST LEGO League and FIRST LEGO League Jr., with annual challenges for primary and secondary school-aged kids to tackle using LEGO Mindstorms.



2002

NASA's Mars Public Engagement Program and the Planetary Society team up with the LEGO Group for a contest to name the Mars Exploration Rovers. A life-size LEGO model of the rover is displayed at public events, conferences and museums to promote the contest and the mission.

2003

Nine-year-old Sofi Collis's winning essay is selected from nearly 10,000 entries. She names the rovers Spirit and Opportunity, and NASA sends them into space shortly after – complete with real construction bricks and virtual LEGO minifigures. The LEGO Group also launches its own Discovery Kids theme, featuring sets inspired by real-life space missions.

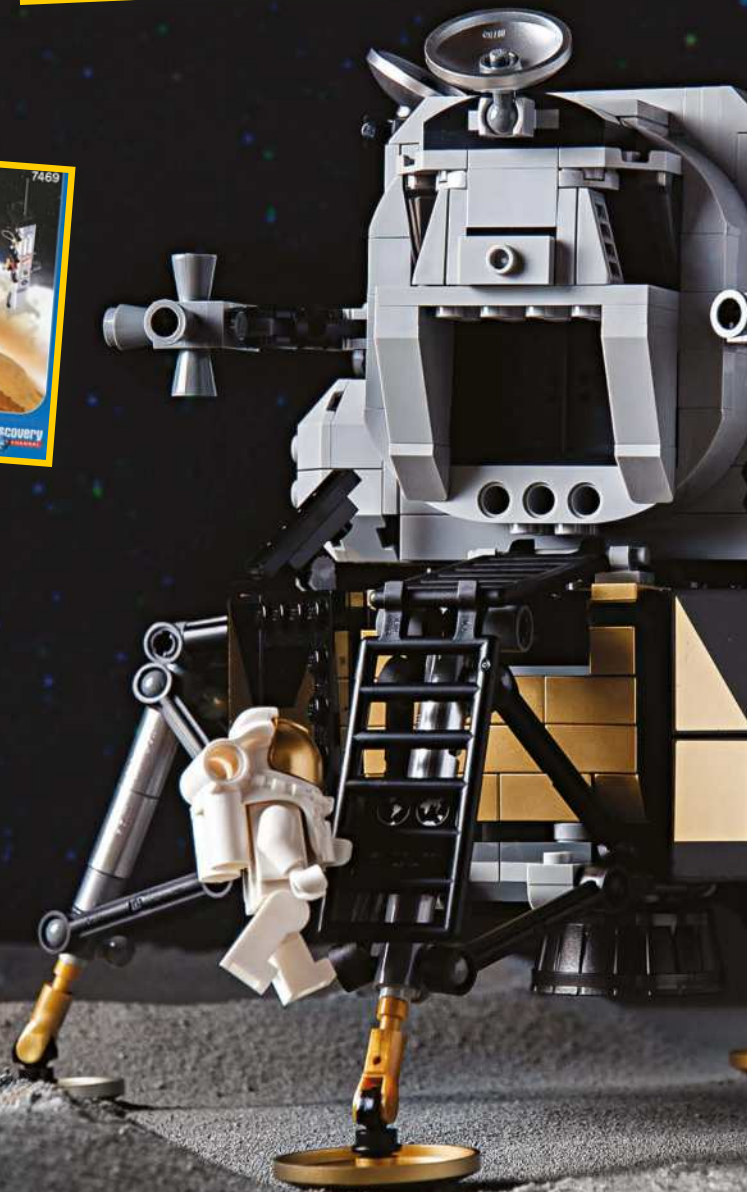


2004

The life-size LEGO Mars Exploration Rover goes on display at Kennedy Space Center, where it remains to this day.

2011

Astronauts build LEGO Education kits aboard the International Space Station on a live video feed, while watching schoolkids do the same in the classroom, to illustrate how objects behave differently on Earth and in space. The LEGO Group also releases a small wave of space-themed CITY sets, and NASA launches the Juno spacecraft, which is bound for Jupiter with three LEGO minifigures attached: the Roman god Jupiter, his wife Juno, and Galileo.





■ ACCESSORY CORNER // 854011 EIFFEL TOWER MAGNET

The LEGO Group's promise to abandon regional exclusives also extends to brand store souvenirs, as this previously Paris-exclusive fridge magnet is now available worldwide. It's a nifty build that does a whole lot with just 29 parts.

■ KEY QUOTE // NIELS B. CHRISTIANSEN

'In the short term, there may be a shift in where we sell. This is what typically occurs and we're well positioned when it happens. We're always trying to move our sale to the channel where we see the demand.' *The LEGO Group's CEO responds to concerns over the coronavirus outbreak.*

2012

The Mars Curiosity Rover is selected as one of the first crowdsourced LEGO sets via CUUSOO, the precursor to LEGO Ideas. The LEGO Group collaborates with NASA's Mars Public Engagement Program to create an informational booklet included in each set, detailing the Curiosity Rover's mission to Mars.

2013

The LEGO Group and NASA jointly launch a contest to encourage kids to design future spacecraft from bricks. The grand prize winner is a satellite designed to study the outermost part of the sun's atmosphere.

2015

The European Space Agency teams up with the LEGO Group, as Andreas Mogensen – Denmark's first astronaut – takes 26 specially-designed minifigures to the International Space Station. Each one bears the logo of his mission, and will be handed out to schoolkids upon his return.

2016

The LEGO Group and NASA collaborate on an online activity hub titled 'Mission to Space', with facts, videos and games related to the three locations LEGO bricks have travelled: Mars, Jupiter and the ISS.

2017

NASA works with the LEGO Group on two space-themed Ideas models: 21309 NASA Apollo Saturn V, and 21312 Women of NASA.

2019

The two organisations come together to develop a range of CITY sets inspired by real-life space exploration, and a one-off Creator Expert set to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the first moon landing, 10266 NASA Apollo 11 Lunar Lander.



NEWS IN BRIEF

■ DUTCH MASTERS

The next series of LEGO MASTERS will transport the competitive building action to the Netherlands, where actors and TV personalities Ruben Nicolai and Kürt Rogiers will take on hosting duties.

■ MOVIE WORLD

LEGOLAND Billund's brand new The LEGO Movie World has just opened for the very first time, bringing three new attractions to the historic resort. There are also six hotel rooms for guests to stay in, each themed around the characters, vehicles and locations from the LEGO cinematic universe.

■ BRAILLE '21

The LEGO Foundation will finally launch its long-awaited Braille Bricks in 2021. That's a slight delay from its original trajectory, which had initial distribution pegged for 2020, and is apparently due to national partners still being selected for the program's pilot markets.

■ LEGO ANTIVIRUS

Elementary school students in Taiwan have built an automated disinfectant dispenser in order to combat the spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus. The dispenser, which incorporates unidentified 'robotics' – presumably Mindstorms – uses an ultrasonic sensor to detect hands, then proclaims, 'Washing hands is super,' before dishing out disinfectant.

TOP TEN

REAL-WORLD SPACE SETS

As the International Space Station joins the ranks of sets inspired by real-life space programs, we count down the best of the LEGO Group's journeys into the brick beyond

Words: Chris Wharfe Pics: The LEGO Group, Phil Wrighton

21312 WOMEN OF NASA

It might not be as exciting as the rest of the sets on this list, each of which builds a much larger version of a real-world spacecraft, but 21312 Women of NASA earns its place for three reasons: first, it's an excellent celebration of the contribution of women to the US space program; second, it's small enough to be put on display by just about anyone, regardless of how much space you have; and third, its microscale space shuttle – complete with fuel tank and rocket boosters – is a brilliant build on its own. Best of all, you could get all that for just under £20, making this a rare entry-level model among real-world space sets.

10



21101 HAYABUSA

In its earliest days, LEGO Ideas was branded CUUSOO, and operated solely in Japan. As a result, the theme's first sets launched in that country alone – making them incredibly difficult to come by for the rest of us. Among those limited release sets was 21101 Hayabusa, based on a real-life Japanese spacecraft that collected asteroid samples from deep space in 2003. In a group of sets dominated by NASA spacecraft, the chance to own something different was welcome. It's just a shame it was available to so few.

9



1682 SPACE SHUTTLE LAUNCH

Modern real-world space sets arguably wouldn't be where they are today without their 20th century ancestors, so it's only right that we acknowledge the LEGO Group's original space shuttle. Launching from store shelves in 1990, the model may have shared more than a little of its DNA with LEGO planes at the time – but that didn't stop it from capturing countless young imaginations. Five years later, 6339 Shuttle Launch Pad superseded its design, but 1682 has the nostalgia factor in spades.

7

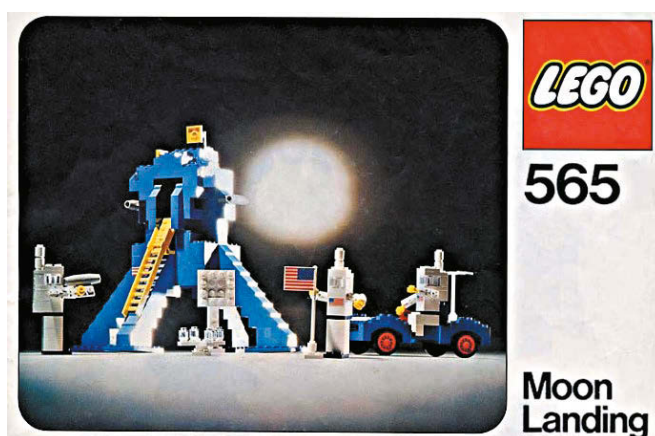


8

THERE'S
SOMETHING
UNDENIABLY
SPECIAL
ABOUT
BUILDING THE
FOUNDING
FATHER OF
MODERN
REAL-LIFE
SPACE SETS

565 MOON LANDING

If we're talking nostalgia, it doesn't get much better than 565 Moon Landing. Released two years before the minifigure was introduced, this lunar lander and its three brick-built astronauts look positively primitive today. But that doesn't make them any less formative in the LEGO Group's history, and there's something undeniably special about building the founding father of modern real-life space sets. It's famously said that the Apollo Guidance Computer that took Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin to the moon had the processing power of a pocket calculator. 565 feels like the LEGO analogue equivalent – it might not boast technical prowess, but it served its function perfectly at the time.



21321 INTERNATIONAL SPACE STATION

The latest real-world space product to emerge from Billund may not be the greatest ever to do so, but it's still another strong entry in the stable of Ideas space sets. And, of course, Christoph Ruge's project blows the socks off the LEGO Group's last International Space Station, released in 2003 as part of its Discovery Channel theme. And what the station represents in real life essentially makes it the perfect candidate for LEGO: just as bricks can help people from all walks of life find common ground, so too does the International Space Station bring together the collective efforts of five different space agencies.

**7471 MARS EXPLORATION ROVER**

Probably the best set to come out of the 2003 wave of Discovery-branded models was 7471 Mars Exploration Rover. In many ways, it was ahead of its time, and not just in the way that its subject matter ventured to a brave new world. Beneath its folding blue panels (as opposed to the black panels of the real thing, with the LEGO Group seemingly taking a page from its TIE Fighter design playbook) lies a complex Technic structure, incorporating four different gear systems to control the steering, camera, radar and robotic arm. Even if its aesthetics weren't 100% accurate, its role in raising the profile of modern space programs was commendable.

**21104 NASA MARS SCIENCE LABORATORY CURIOSITY ROVER**

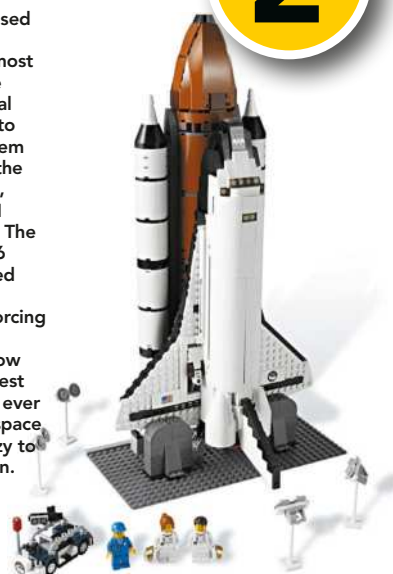
Eight years after the LEGO Mars Exploration Rover hit shelves, a new robot landed on the red planet. And thanks to Stephen Pakbaz, an engineer who worked on the real-life Curiosity rover, the LEGO Group didn't have to let it pass by unnoticed. Stephen's CUUSOO project became the fifth set released under the crowdsourcing theme's banner in 2014, packing in six-wheel suspension and an articulated robotic arm. As you'd expect from a model designed by someone directly involved with the source material, it's also incredibly authentic to the real deal.

**10266 NASA APOLLO 11 LUNAR LANDER**

After a steady stream of Ideas space sets, the LEGO Group placed the onus back on Creator Expert in 2019 with 10266 NASA Apollo 11 Lunar Lander. And it didn't skimp out at all: from the metallic gold pieces representing the aluminised film that regulated the lander's temperature to the detailed base that included minifigure footprints, this is the definitive LEGO version of the craft that first touched down on the moon some 51 years ago.

**10231 SHUTTLE EXPEDITION**

In 2010, the LEGO Group released 10213 Shuttle Adventure to widespread praise. It was the most visually impressive LEGO space shuttle to date, but its structural prowess couldn't quite live up to its aesthetics. That was a problem for younger fans who ignored the set's 16+ age recommendation, and led to the release of 10231 Shuttle Expedition a year later. The replacement model included 26 extra parts, a completely revised instruction manual, and several structural improvements, reinforcing the set and opening it up to a much broader audience. The now nine-year-old set remains the best space shuttle the company has ever launched – but with its recent space renaissance, it wouldn't be crazy to expect an updated version soon.

**21309 NASA APOLLO SATURN V**

Few LEGO sets could be considered essential, but if any were to take that crown, it would be 21309 NASA Apollo Saturn V. Not only did it kick-start the current wave of real-world space sets that's arrived steadily since 2017, it's also a slice of sheer LEGO design genius. From the outside, you'd never know the rocket's cylinder was a carefully-constructed assembly of brackets, in the first appearance of a ground-breaking technique that's since been used in sets like 71043 Hogwarts Castle. But that simply makes the build all the more special, because when you pop it on display, only you really know the mastery that's gone into making it happen – just like the average Joe may not know exactly what went into putting real men on the moon in 1969. You probably can't call yourself a NASA scientist after building it, but it's pretty close in our book.

DESIGNING OLD TRAFFORD

LEGO Design Master Mike Psiaki reveals the design secrets behind Old Trafford, from scaling the stadium to printing the pitch

Words: Chris Wharfe Pics: Mike Psiaki, The LEGO Group



you never know what we will be doing in the future. Let's just say all those ideas aren't totally dismissed. We tested some of these ideas out in the wild during summer 2018. That's how we narrowed down to the idea of a sports arena, and doing one at a (relatively) massive scale. In autumn 2018 we narrowed down to our choice of Old Trafford. Part of our considerations was the 110-year anniversary of the stadium, but another part is simply the incredible history and following the club has on a global scale.

I HAVE A FEW COLLEAGUES WHO SUPPORT LIVERPOOL WHO WOULD INSIST WE SHOULD BE BUILDING ANFIELD INSTEAD

FROM KICK-OFF TO the final whistle, designing a LEGO set is a long and storied process. But when it comes to the LEGO Group's first ever real-life football stadium, it's arguably a whole other ballgame. Fortunately, we've got the match report straight from the source, as we caught up with the set's lead designer, Mike Psiaki, to find out how it all came together.

Blocks: How did the partnership between the LEGO Group and Manchester United come about? Was the intention always to tie this release into the stadium's 110th anniversary?

Mike: In the LEGO Architecture line we've been throwing around the idea of sports arenas for the past 10 years, but we started talking seriously about making a sports-themed set in spring 2018. We went through quite a bit of exploration as to what it could be, and I won't say more than that because

How did you determine the scale of the stadium?

We knew that we wanted to make the stadium big, but still something that people will have a chance of putting out on display once they finish building. I started by scaling the pitch to different LEGO system widths, and finding the ones that matched with a nice system length, then picked from there a 14-module-wide pitch, as it meant the dimensions of the overall model wouldn't get too out of hand!

What did the research process involve? Did you travel to the real stadium?

We (myself and our intern at the time, John Klapheke) built the first version of the model based on pictures, and a scaled printout of a satellite image as a plan view. Jamie Berard (Design Manager of Creator Expert) and I then took that model to Manchester to see the real stadium, and be shown around and have the history of the club and the stadium

explained, which helped us to make a much more accurate model. There were a lot of details like the Munich Tunnel, the hospitality suites at the top of the first level, and the shaping and structure of the roof struts on the east and west ends that were either missing from our model or built very incorrectly.

Did the model present any unique challenges during the design process?

For me there were plenty of unique challenges in this model as it was the first time I've done a microscale structure (unless you count the Saturn V rocket for Ideas). This stadium is scaled about 1 to 600, so every single piece is representing so much material and space in the real world. The most unique problem for this model in general though was how to find a solution for representing the seats. We originally tried stepping plate layers to capture all the rows, but not having enough rows of seats did a bad job of conveying the scale of the model. We played around with a few different ideas for how to capture the scale of the seats before we ended up with the solution of using angled classic profile bricks – a solution I'm quite proud of!

Why are the pitch elements printed, given almost everything else is stickered?

We felt that the pitch is the most important part of the stadium to get right. It's the heart of Old Trafford, and that's where your attention is drawn in a real match, so that's where we wanted to put the attention on this model. We also feel that of all the potential decorations (both stickers and prints), the pitch is the one that has the biggest potential for people to take and reuse in their own models. I'm eagerly waiting for the football stadium MOCs to come flooding in!

Do you support a particular football team? Do any of your colleagues, and was there any joking rivalry between you over the project?

Development of Old Trafford overlapped with 10271 Fiat 500.



The final model.

At the start of developing this model I didn't support any team. After making the model and learning so much about the stadium and the club and the history of Manchester United, I can't help feeling excited for them when they win, and I can't help keeping up on the scores. I would say I'm still a Manchester United fan in the making.

I have a colleague, Tim Ainley, who is from Manchester and is a lifetime supporter of United. He was very helpful in providing input and insights throughout the model development. I also have a few colleagues who support Liverpool, and who would insist on at least a weekly basis that we were making a huge mistake and should be building Anfield instead. At one point, as a joke I put scoreboard stickers in the model that said United 10-0 Liverpool with only five minutes of game time elapsed. I thought it

was a funny joke, but I got formal complaints within 10 minutes of putting it on the model.

Old Trafford contains a new windscreen element for the roof, which has also been

WE ORIGINALLY TRIED STEPPING PLATE LAYERS TO CAPTURE ALL THE ROWS, BUT IT DID A BAD JOB OF CONVEYING THE SCALE

used in the new Creator Expert Fiat 500. Was this designed for either the Fiat 500 or Old Trafford first and foremost, or was it specifically designed to work for both sets?

There are two new element designs in Old Trafford that are shared with the Fiat 500. One is the 1x10x3 windscreen, the other is a new 1x4 transparent bow brick that's used as the side windows of the Fiat. Both elements were developed initially with the Fiat 500 in mind, as we did the Fiat 500 conceptual work first. When we make a new element though, we like to design something that will work well for a given product, but also have broad applications throughout the whole building system. Also, when we develop an element in our project, we try extra hard to get it into more than one model within the line, like the 1x2 brick with bow that was used in both the Aston Martin DB5 and the Rollercoaster in 2018. ■

Turn to page 38 to read our verdict on 10272 Old Trafford - Manchester United.



Mike played around with different pitch designs and scales.

Ticolug

Luis Escalante introduces us to Costa Rica's first and only LEGO User Group

Words: Chris Wharfe

Pics: Luis Escalante, Ticolug

Can you explain the LUG's name?

We decided to join the Spanish word 'Tico' with the LEGO User Group initials because the people of our country are recognised around the world as 'Ticos', so that name identifies us.

Where is Ticolug based?

It is based in Costa Rica, a small country located in Central America, between Panama and Nicaragua.

How many members are in the LUG?

Right now, the community has 40 members and our objective is to reach 50 at the end of 2020.

Who is the ambassador?

The ambassador is Luis Escalante, a LEGO Castle and Pirates fan since he was a child.

How and when was it formed?

Ticolug was established in 2010 by only five members, with the 'crazy' idea to form a group of friends who share experiences about this amazing hobby. Seven years ago, we had our first event in a small store, and in 2015 we participated in two more, but it wasn't until 2017 that we decided to take it to the next level. Since then we have worked hard, and last year, when the LEGO Ambassador Network reopened the application process, we filled out the form, met the requirements and obtained official recognition.

How often do you meet?

We meet every two months, and we always try to choose a different place – either a house, a restaurant, or a shopping mall, to make it easy and enjoyable for our members.

What do your meetings involve?

Usually, our meetings involve a space for official announcements, and reports of past activities, future events and things that



WHAT IS A LEGO USER GROUP (LUG)?

- A group of AFOLs, recognised by the LEGO Group
- Non-profit, driven by volunteers
- A supportive environment of like-minded individuals
- Welcomes all ability levels
- Hosts regular meetings to discuss ideas, news and builds
- Organises and participates in public events and conventions
- Works with the LEGO Group through their appointed Ambassador

MY FAVOURITE PART IS MEETING NEW PEOPLE FROM OTHER COMMUNITIES AND LEGO FANS AROUND THE WORLD

are happening on the LEGO Ambassador Network. However, we try to spend more time talking to each other, sharing ideas, news, building techniques or just bringing up information about the LEGO world in general.

Are you involved with any local shows?

It is complicated to be part of any local shows in almost all Latin America, because the nearest LEGO Office is in Mexico and we don't have an official LEGO store in our country, so sales are controlled by the local distributor and they are just beginning to open LEGO

branded stores. Therefore, we are working on settling a formal relationship with them to have an annual event schedule, but it has been difficult. Meanwhile, our events are organised and sponsored by other private companies or associations, and most of them are located in shopping malls.

What's your favourite thing about being part of the LUG?

My favourite part is meeting new people from other communities and LEGO fans around the world, exchanging ideas and experiences with them, and of course, getting all the support and benefits that the LEGO Ambassador Network gives us, like LUGBULK, activity and project support, and much more.

Has the LUG reached any milestones or done anything you're particularly proud of? For instance, group trips, large collaborative builds, shows organised directly by the LUG etc.

We are proud to be the first and only Recognised LEGO User Group in Costa Rica. We have worked hard to get it, and last year we made it. Also, in 2019 we had our biggest event of all time, with almost 800 square meters of exhibition to celebrate National Children's Day here in our country. 30 community members displayed a huge amount of MOCs and theme sets, and we had approximately 6,000 visitors. Also, we are very proud of having a LEGO Ideas 10K Club member in our community. His name is Francisco Escobar and he has a new project on the platform called Spinning Planets. Last but certainly not least, this year – for the



Ticolug currently has 40 members.



Ticolug's biggest event yet was held in September 2019.



An airport MOC by LUG member Allan Rodriguez.



Ticolug's Vice President Junior Vásquez built this enormous Avengers Tower.



Francisco Escobar's newest Ideas project.



Budapest train station, by Ticolug President Attila Campos.



third time in a row – we will participate in the biggest LEGO event in Central America, Brick Fest Panama, held by our colleagues at RLUG Panama.

What are the benefits of joining a LUG like yours? Are there any costs involved for members?

For a \$5 USD monthly fee, we offer the community members benefits like advice on building techniques, access to exclusive content, recognition by other official groups, possible royalties or sales, access to discounts, and of course, the chance to participate in the LEGO Ambassador Network programs such as LUGBULK, activity support, project support and others.

Do your members take part in any other LUGs, or have you ever collaborated with other nearby LUGs?

We keep in touch with the other recognised groups located in Central America, LUG Panama and 'La Vida en Bloques' RLUG Guatemala. We constantly share ideas and experiences with them. We try to participate in their events and they try to do the same with ours. They are our nearest friends in this LEGO world. Also, as I'm the newest ambassador, if I have any doubts or questions, I know that they have the right answers.

What plans do you have for future events?

We do our best to have at least six events throughout the year. Now we can confirm that we will have two events in May, one at a university and another at a shopping mall. Also, some community members will attend

and exhibit the Brick Fest Panama 2020 in August. As usual, and for the fifth year in a row, we will have our annual National Children's Day event, and we are planning to have our first self-organised Brick Fest here in Costa Rica in 2021, so if you are planning to visit our country, follow us on Facebook (@ticolugr) or Instagram (@ticolug) for more information.

What's the best show you've ever been to?
Definitely the Brick Fest Panama 2019 – our

RLUG colleagues set 1,000 square meters of LEGO bricks with different themes like CITY, Star Wars, NINJAGO, Technic and many more. Until now, I haven't had the chance to participate in the big shows that the European or US communities organise, but I hope to have the opportunity someday to go to the Skaerbaek Fan Weekend in Denmark. Last year, I went to LEGOLAND Billund and the LEGO House, and it was one of the most amazing experiences ever. ■

Daniel Konstanski

THE SINGLE SHEET ADVERT

Daniel is delighted to find a relic of his youth making an unexpected comeback



WRITER BIO

Lifelong LEGO obsessive passionate about collecting. With a thorough knowledge of LEGO over the years, he is Blocks' historian.

NINJAGO WAS THE last place I would have expected to find a hearty dose of nostalgia for my childhood LEGO passion, yet there we were. I had just finished popping open one of the smaller sets from the theme's inaugural 2020 wave, pouring all the contents out on to the table. Along with the requisite bags of parts, sticker sheet and instructions was something I did not expect. It was an item that called back to a different time and place, before the internet, social media and YouTube dominated advertising: a single sheet advert.

Readers of a certain age will know exactly what I am talking about when they read that

I WAS DELIGHTED TO SEE THE RETURN OF SOMETHING THAT CARRIED SO MANY HAPPY MEMORIES FOR ME

line. For those with fewer grey hairs on their heads, allow me to explain. In the analogue days of my youth there were two primary methods through which the LEGO Group advertised to kids. Like every other major toy brand, the first was TV adverts during Saturday morning cartoons. Alas, my dear mum was of the persuasion that those shows would rot my brain and drain me of any moral compass, so my entire exposure to those classic bits of LEGO history has come through watching them two decades later on YouTube – a pastime I have spent far more hours doing than is probably healthy. Forced denial truly does lead to desire.

Fortunately for those of us with mums like mine, there was a second avenue employed

to entice kids into asking for more LEGO sets on their next birthday: in-product advertising. Every product came with a piece of marketing included in the box. For larger sets – normally those with more than 200 pieces, or a price point north of £20 – it was the much-loved miniature catalogue. Products that fell below that threshold, and therefore came in a box too small to easily hold the larger version, would come with a 'summary sheet', consisting of a single page printed with smaller spreads of layouts that made up the catalogue. Each sheet would be printed on both sides, with one side showing a large layout relevant to the set's theme, and the other showing an array of photos from other product lines and sets.

The attribute that made both the catalogues

and single sheet adverts magnificent was the layout images each contained. Seeing such things was a rarity back then. This was a time long before AFOL conventions. Prior to the mid-'90s, there was only one LEGOLAND park that, for a kid from a working-class family in the American Midwest, might as well have been on the moon for all the likelihood of me ever getting there. Seeing large LEGO layouts, either in the flesh or in pictures, was just not something that happened to most kids. These massive layouts, with model terrain and every set we wanted – but could never dream of owning – were the stuff of an eight-year-old's fantasy. Imagine having all the Islanders and Pirates sets to play with at the same time, or every set from all three factions of the current



A year's offerings would be shown on one side.



Exciting scenes comprised of multiple sets were the norm.

LEGOLAND Town System

Ages 6-12

You're the Winner with LEGOLAND Town!

There are 23 Town sets with exciting themes like Race, Adventure, Emergency, and Service and Repair. Nine NEW sets expand the building possibilities and offer more play opportunity than ever before!

Mail Order Service Extra parts and accessories are available by mail. For complete information write: LEGO® Mail Order Service, P.O. Box 939, Enfield, CT 06032.

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6382 Turbo Racer

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Space theme! Beautifully laid out over what must have sometimes been huge areas and shot with picture-perfect lighting, they were awesome.

When the LEGO Group went digital in the late '90s and early 2000s, these advertisements began to be phased out. The grand images were replaced with bland shots of sets against a digital background. Then, when the LEGO Group almost went under and launched a desperate cost-cutting venture, both printed materials were given the final axe. Having not seen a new one in nearly two decades, my shock and delight were immense when this new one fell on to my table from the NINJAGO box. While certainly not quite at the level of those from my youth, I was nonetheless delighted to see the return of something that carried with it so many happy memories for me. I have met many other AFOLs at conventions who also have fond memories of these advertising materials and, like me, spent many hours poring over them.

And we weren't wrong to do so. I now have every Islanders and Pirates set from the mid-'90s, along with every Space set released from the decade – and they really are magnificent to see assembled all together in a giant display. ■

Graham Hancock

GOING BEYOND THE BRICK

Graham reflects on the many walks of life LEGO journalism takes him down

Pics: The LEGO Group, Laurens Parsons, Carlos Arturo Torres



WRITER BIO

Long term LEGO fan specialising in everything from Pirates to Star Wars, with a soft spot for exhibitions and LEGOLAND.

FURTHER INTO THIS month's issue, you can read about Dr. Steen Dupont's work at the Natural History Museum. He's an entomologist using LEGO in surprising ways, so off I went to South Kensington to meet him and find out more about what he does.

Turning up at the Natural History Museum and heading 'behind the scenes' to his workspace was something I hadn't put myself into the right mindset for – as a child, I loved visiting the museum and would have been delighted at the thought of getting to peek behind the curtain. While it didn't have quite the same wow factor as an adult, it was nice to think of what my perception would have been back then.

Even if I couldn't appreciate it in the exact same way, it was fascinating to get to sit down with an expert in their field and hear about it. It got me thinking about how even though writing about the LEGO hobby is quite a niche space to be in, there are some wonderful opportunities to meet interesting people outside of the brick world.

Many people outside the hobby are often surprised at how much is going on in the LEGO world at any given time – they don't realise how hard we find it to narrow Blocks down to 112 pages. Something I had not realised myself a few years ago is just how many different people it would bring me into contact with.

Speaking to the LEGO professionals about their work is fascinating, but if that were the only type of interview I conducted, it would become stale. Thankfully, there are many 'LEGO-adjacent' individuals like Steen who make sure that I don't go to sleep at night only dreaming in LEGO bricks (I've got my dreams down to half LEGO bricks, which I'm sure must be a positive thing).

Take the House of DOTS event last month – Camille Walala was not on my radar before that, but I spent time looking at her work in preparation for the interview. I was particularly

As well as being a Star Wars alum, Matt Denton is a LEGO fan.



taken by her reimagining of a gas station in Arkansas. Although her artwork is clearly not for everyone, I was certain to make a mental note that I was speaking to a talented, creative individual and should enjoy the opportunity.

I have even interviewed someone about interior design – admittedly, that was LEGO interior design, but it's still a long way removed from what I expected my work on Blocks to entail. On another occasion I was able to try my

THERE ARE SOME WONDERFUL OPPORTUNITIES TO MEET INTERESTING PEOPLE OUTSIDE OF THE BRICK WORLD

hand at travel writing through a LEGO lens.

Way back when Blocks was a much younger magazine, I spoke to Jon Bartlett and Keely Parnaby about their work in using LEGO images to communicate complex messages about mental health. At the time it was fascinating to hear about the medium of LEGO being used for such a positive reason – little did I realise how many more people I would encounter also trying to improve the world one brick at a time.

Carlos Arturo Torres was one such person, and he was completely inspiring. His mission involved building LEGO-compatible arms for amputee children in Columbia, doing valuable work to improve the lives of youngsters who had been impacted by war.

Thinking back to what would have impressed me as a child, sitting down with Star Wars Electronics Design and Development Supervisor Matt Denton to talk about the droids and creatures he has designed, while building the LEGO BB-8 model, would probably be one that would have blown my mind.

Some of the people I have spoken to could not be further apart, which is what makes the work so enjoyable. They are doing different things, with different degrees of connection to the LEGO brick, and communicate their experiences in different ways.

Thinking about the varied nature of the features we work on here at Blocks, I feel very fortunate to be working on a LEGO publication. While these professional highlights are enjoyable at the time, what I really love is turning them into features for readers to enjoy. Giving everyone a glimpse into the work of an entomologist using LEGO bricks or artists collaborating to design a LEGO building is really rewarding.

A varied work life for the Blocks team means a varied magazine, as this issue illustrates once again. ■

Camille Walala is an artist who found herself working with the LEGO Group.



Carlos Arturo Torres developed LEGO-compatible prosthetic arms.



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Chris Wharfe

THE GOLDEN AGE

Chris realises his rose-tinted LEGO glasses are actually constructed entirely out of lies



WRITER BIO

Experienced journalist with a lifelong addiction to LEGO, Star Wars and Super Heroes. Blocks' resident northerner.

REMEMBER WHEN SALES were good? I'm not talking about Amazon's regular 30% discounts, but the golden age of proper sales. When you could walk into a toy store and expect to regularly find half price LEGO, or score even better deals in clearance sections. Until recently, I figured those days were long behind us. I'm not quite sure what gave me that notion, but I realised in January that it was completely off-base. The golden age is actually still going on.

This particular insight wandered into my head around halfway down aisle 23 of my local supermarket, where I was met with an abundance of yellow shelf-edge labels. That also happened to be the toy aisle, and I was standing in front of a real gamut of deeply discounted LEGO sets, marked down by 50% to 75%.

After that tiny rush at finding cheap LEGO subsided – you know the one I'm talking about – I began filling my trolley, and musing over how rarely this kind of thing happens. But then I thought about it some more, and came to the conclusion that my longing for the good old days was entirely misguided. (And then I realised how Brexit happened.)

To focus on a concrete example of my poorly-perceived golden age of sales, I have distinct memories of Toys R Us regularly running 3 for 2 deals, bolstered by the kinds of promos now restricted to official outlets. (A free chrome Darth Vader minifigure for spending over £30 springs to mind.) But even while that titan of the toy industry has fallen victim to its own stagnant business model, supermarkets have stepped in to offer bigger and better discounts.

Last year, I picked up 75203 Hoth Medical Chamber and 76096 Superman & Krypto Team-Up for just £9.99 apiece, slashed down from £34.99 and £19.99 respectively. Both were from leading UK supermarkets, and now I check down the toy aisle basically every time



I'm grocery shopping. (This has had the side effect of making every journey to get food surprisingly expensive, even when the LEGO is relatively cheap.)

From my anecdotal experience, discounts across the pond seem to have held up pretty well too. Back in 2008, I indulged in a LEGO Store sale at Orlando's Downtown Disney, now Disney Springs, where the combination of a

I CONCLUDED MY LONGING FOR THE GOOD OLD DAYS WAS ENTIRELY MISGUIDED. AND THEN I REALISED HOW BREXIT HAPPENED

strong pound and bargain prices made for some of the best deals I've ever encountered – 7041 Troll Battle Wheel for £10, 7661 Jedi Starfighter with Hyperdrive Booster Ring for £12.50, and others I can unfortunately no longer recall.

Fast forward to 2020, and LEGO Store (and LEGO.com) sales have basically dried up, no matter where you are in the world. But just as they do in the UK, supermarkets have it covered stateside, too. In another trip to the sunshine state in 2018, pit stops at Walmart and Target turned up 21041 Great Wall of

China for \$24.99, 75204 Speedster for \$14.99, and 75951 Grindelwald's Escape for \$9.99.

While supermarkets are a great source of deals, though, most of us still turn to Amazon for our discount LEGO. And the online retailer usually delivers, knocking most sets down by 30% or so. They're steady and reliable – if not dramatic – sales. But occasionally, you do stumble upon a gem. In writing this column, I've just remembered the time I bagged 75151 Clone Turbo Tank for a paltry £19.99, which sort of felt like stealing, given it retailed for £109.99. And literally as I type, I've just ordered 75945 Expectorator for a handy 60% off.

I'm not trying to brag with all these examples – I'm sure many of you have found bigger and better deals over the years – but just to highlight the fallacies in my own thinking. Somehow, I'd convinced myself that the days of good deals were in the past, when really, they've never gone away.

Just as most of us think LEGO is getting more expensive, so too do we often pine for the golden age of bigger and better discounts, or specific styles of LEGO set, or simpler minifigures – when the reality is that LEGO has stayed consistently expensive, discounts are just as good as ever, and the sets and minifigures of today are different for a whole host of legitimate reasons. So take off those rose-tinted glasses, and join me in aisle 23. There's cheap LEGO to be had. ■



Supermarkets are the place to go for cheap LEGO.



This had been sitting at £20 for months. Patience is key.



A selection of the bargain sets I've bought in the past 12 months. The golden age is now.



75151 Clone Turbo Tank is probably the best deal I've ever scored, and it was only three years ago.



SOCIAL SNAPSHOTS

Instagram is home to a thriving community of LEGO photographers. We chat to three accomplished shutterbugs for their insight into shooting well, and sharing better

Words: Chris Wharfe **Pics:** Phil Wrighton, Chris Rose, Anthony Bill



UNTIL THE LATE 1800s, photography was solely the preserve of society's wealthiest individuals. A hundred years of technological advancements later, and 21st century living has placed the means of production squarely in the hands of the proles – but probably not in the way Marx had in mind. While our capitalist overlords may not be going anywhere, the art of photography has gradually been claimed by the masses, and it's now one of the most accessible hobbies imaginable. All you need is your phone.

But even if you've spent years learning the tricks of the trade, and poured your blood, sweat and tears into a lovingly-crafted portfolio of images, it can be difficult to get anyone to pay attention. Social media's democratisation of content sharing is a double-edged sword: anyone can now post their photos online, but everyone now posts their photos online. So if you're a budding LEGO photographer, how do you make sure your work finds an audience? According to Otto Reisenberg, the answer lies in communities.

'I noticed that there weren't many opportunities for toy photographers – and their amazing photos – to be featured and get more exposure,' Otto explains. He's the brains behind ToyPic Community, an initiative that's brought together toy photographers from all over the world – including plenty of people focusing their lenses on LEGO bricks – for the inaugural #WorldToyPicDay.

EVERYONE IS VERY SUPPORTIVE OF EACH OTHER'S WORK AND STYLES

'I truly believe that toy photography is an art form, so I started ToyPic Community to showcase all different types of toy photos from all over the world,' he continues. 'My career is in marketing and publicity, and I wanted to raise the awareness and acceptance of toy photography beyond our community. We chose March 18, 2020 as #WorldToyPicDay to unite the global toy photo community, and to have our own holiday.'

Otto's vision extends beyond a single unassuming Wednesday at winter's close, however. At the time of writing, the ToyPic Community consists of more than 700 photographers from 49 different countries, spanning six different continents. (The title of Antarctica's first toy photographer is still up for grabs.) And between them, they have a combined following of almost 1.7 million.

COMMUNITY LIVING

Instagram is Otto's platform of choice, and it's where you'll find those hundreds of toy photographers, each sharing content and engaging with one another's work. 'People are so supportive of each other and post encouraging comments,' he enthuses. 'The whole feeling is positive and nurturing. In fact, using the map and directory on the website, toy photographers are finding each other and meeting up to take photos together! Toy photographers no longer need to feel alone or weird. There is a warm, embracing community here for you.'

It was that sense of community that first drew Chris Rose to the toy photography scene. Like many AFOLs, the launch of LEGO Star Wars in 1999 reignited his passion for the brick. But while he'd snapped the odd LEGO photo here and there, it wasn't until he discovered the sensational work of Vesa Lehtimäki that the flames of a new hobby were stoked.

'I loved his style and the way there was a story behind each image,' Chris explains. 'It made me want to get out and try to create something similar myself. One day, about five years ago, I happened to follow a link to some toy photographers' profiles [on Instagram], and quickly discovered a budding community of like-minded individuals all happily posting amazing LEGO shots and openly sharing hints and tips. I knew then that I had to get involved.'

Chris has since embraced the toy photography community, and even joined Vesa over at Stuck in Plastic, another collective of toy photographers with a focus on LEGO. 'They have regular 'Toy Safari' meet-ups where fellow LEGO photographers get together to shoot in various locations around Europe,' he says. 'A couple of years ago, I took the plunge and decided to meet up with the gang in Edinburgh. It was an amazing experience that cemented my love for the hobby and the community alike.'

Much of Chris's work involves LEGO placed in real-world environments. 'I love to shoot outdoors. I'll always try to carry a few minifigures in my camera bag just in case I stumble across the perfect location or lighting conditions. I may

MEET THE INSTA PROS



Chris Rose

Location: Warrington

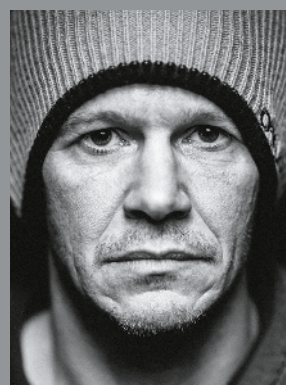
Instagram:

@chrisrosephoto

Equipment: Canon 6Dmkii

Sigma 105mm 2.8 macro lens

Canon 50mm 1.8 lens



Phil Wrighton

Location: Leicester

Instagram: @supa_dupa_ lego_troopa

Equipment: Canon 5D MkII

Canon 7D MkII

Sigma 105mm f/2.8 EX

Sigma 24-70mm f/2.8 DG

Sigma 35mm f/1.4 DG

Lume Cube 2.0 x2

PixaPro Lumi II200 lights x4

Speedlights x3



Anthony Bill

Location: Cambridge

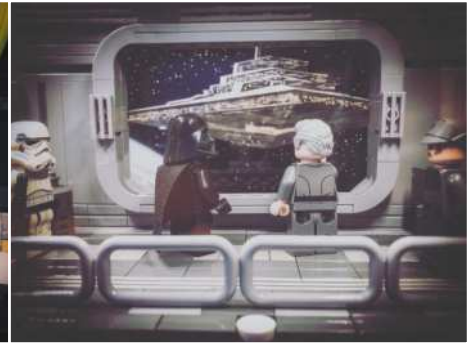
Instagram: @BillsBrickz

Equipment: iPhone 7

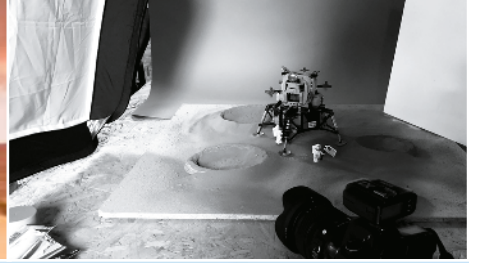
Mashing up multiple themes is a winning strategy.



Some of Anthony's best images.



Anthony's Coruscant Underworld MOC found plenty of love on Instagram.



Star Wars scenes
always prove
popular.

Phil regularly posts
behind-the-scenes
glimpses on his
Instagram page.



HOW TO...

Chris, Phil and Anthony share their favourite tips and tricks for shooting bricks

Chris Rose**...shoot outdoors**

'When you first get into toy photography, lighting can take a bit of trial and error – especially if you are shooting outside. I'd recommend that you check the weather forecast before you head out. A dull, cloudy day can be to your advantage, as the natural light should fall evenly on your subject. If it's a bright, sunny day, try to avoid shooting out in the open where harsh shadows can ruin your shot. Try to shoot under a canopy of trees instead, and look out for shafts of light to add drama to your shots. Try to explore the environment and see if there are places that can help you to tell your story; fallen tree trunks and puddles are some of my personal favourites.'

**Anthony Bill****...shoot indoors**

'Indoor lighting can be tricky! Setting up the correct light for LEGO photography can take a lot of trial and error, but it's totally worth the time

and effort. Artificial indoor lighting like a normal lightbulb (warm white) can really dull a photo! You don't need a massive budget either – I use a small white LED touch and a USB white light bar, which I removed from my light box for flexibility and accessibility.'

Phil Wrighton**...create explosions**

'In the UK we can't purchase 'firecrackers' or 'bangers' any more, but you can get 'cracking balls'. As their name suggests, they're balls that crackle! Using a tripod, set your camera to a fast shutter speed and multiple burst mode. Then position the firework close to your figure, but a safe distance from yourself and your camera. When you've composed your scene, light the fuse, retreat to the safe distance and capture as many frames as possible. Once you're happy with the images, using Adobe Photoshop or similar open several of the frames into one document and blend them into a single image. Using masks, colour and exposure adjustments create your action masterpiece. This may take some time and practice but the final effects can be explosive.'



set out with a few ideas in my head, but more often than not a situation will just present itself. This sort of shooting makes the hobby so accessible as you don't need a lot of kit, just your camera (or phone) and some sets or minifigures.'

ALL THE GEAR, EVERY IDEA

While it's true that you can create amazing pictures with very little equipment, some Instagram users prefer to take full advantage of the many instruments at their disposal. Take Phil Wrighton, for instance: the talented photographer behind our covers makes use of an extensive toolkit for his images, which he aims to capture mostly in-camera, with minimal post-production. But the requirements for each photo are still heavily dependent on what he's shooting.

'Sometimes it's a full studio set-up, involving multiple flash lights and a large backdrop, when capturing something like the Imperial Star Destroyer,' Phil explains, 'all the way down to an A4 board, sand or baking powder, an iPad and a couple of Lume Cubes.' If the mention of Lume Cubes has left you scratching your head, suffice to say Phil describes them as among his favourite photography equipment purchases.

'For their size they really pack a punch,' he elaborates. 'They're the size of a golf ball, manufactured with a tough aluminium casing, and have a host of accessories – including diffusion and coloured gels, modifiers and snoots – that magnetically attach to the modification frame and are stackable. It's like having a full studio lighting kit in a small carry case. The lights are also easily controlled through an app on your smartphone, making them incredibly versatile.'

Phil originally began posting food photos on Instagram, but soon pivoted to toy photography. He now shifts his focuses between LEGO, Star Wars Black Series action figures, and most recently, dinosaurs. And while he's also dabbled with Flickr, it was that keenly-felt sense of community that pushed him toward the social media platform. 'Everyone is very supportive of each other's work and styles,' he says. 'I also find the Instagram feed pleasing to the eye – it's structured, and I like structure.'

■ ■ IF YOU CAN ADD SOME HUMOUR OR TELL AN EXCITING STORY IN YOUR SHOT, IT CAN HELP IT TO CONNECT WITH PEOPLE'S IMAGINATIONS ■ ■

Among all the content Phil creates, he finds Star Wars is generally the most popular subject, within both the toy photography community and the wider Instagram userbase. That's an experience shared by Chris, although he notes that the subject often comes second. 'Generally, if you can add some humour or tell an exciting story in your shot, it can help it to connect with people's imaginations,' he says.

SHOOTING STAR (WARS)

Cinema's second-most profitable saga (behind the Marvel Cinematic Universe, if you're wondering) has also proved to be a winning ticket for Anthony Bill, a toy photographer who's managed to carve out his own niche among the Instagram community. In early 2019, Anthony headed to the social platform in hopes of getting more eyes on his custom MOC instructions.

'I wasn't very active for the first couple of months, or popular!' He recalls. 'I then began taking pictures with coloured card backgrounds to try to gain more attention. This also wasn't very successful, and I needed to stand out. This was when I had the idea of building MOC backgrounds to shoot minifigures with. I now wouldn't have it any other way! It's become a passion shooting scenes and building rather than promoting the MOC instructions.'

Looking at Anthony's pictures across these pages, it's difficult to believe he started out only a year ago, with limited knowledge of both Instagram and photography. But again, it was the community that came to the rescue. 'I learned a lot through other creators' behind-the-scenes posts and stories,' he explains. 'I still watch a lot of stories to learn new techniques most days. @Jonaskramm and @lego_nuts both post incredible behind-the-scenes shots and videos, which are great for lighting, set-up and general tips. Toy photography blogs and YouTube tutorials are also great for learning new techniques.'

In the months since, Anthony has combined his newfound photography skills with his existing building talents, with great results for one model in particular. 'The Coruscant Underworld MOC I made went crazy,' he says. 'It was actually a competition build entry for a group on Facebook called 'Lego Build Offs & Banter' – and it won! Once published it rocketed to over 1,000 likes in days. At the time my pictures were averaging 200-300 likes. It was incredible. It was shared an awful lot and I received some amazing feedback and love from the community!'

A LEAP OF FAITH

As Anthony has proved within a very short space of time, it really couldn't be easier to dive into the toy photography community. And if you're still on the fence, Chris offers some salient advice. 'Just get out there and start posting,' he says. 'Don't worry about making mistakes. Interact with fellow LEGO photographers and don't be afraid to ask for help. I've never met anyone on Instagram who didn't want to share their knowledge.'

YOU DON'T NECESSARILY NEED EXPENSIVE EQUIPMENT – A MOBILE PHONE IS MORE THAN ENOUGH

'The best thing to do is be active and engage with everyone,' Anthony agrees. 'Reach out to others and never be scared to ask for advice! Try to do something unique – for me the next focus is back on the Star Wars Original Trilogy. Pick a theme and run with it; something you feel comfortable with. I am more than happy to help with any advice and support!'

Even if you don't feel prepared to reach out to others, Phil says there's a lot of value in reverse engineering. 'Look at images and try to work out how they've been created,' he advises. 'Many posts also have behind-the-scenes images, which can give you a good starting point. You don't necessarily need expensive equipment – a mobile phone is more than enough, and most of all, use your imagination.'

From Chris, Phil and Anthony's experience, anyone who takes the leap and shares their content on Instagram should find a welcoming community of fans – alongside an absolute wealth of LEGO photos to enjoy. And who knows? Your images might just get picked up by the ToyPic Community.

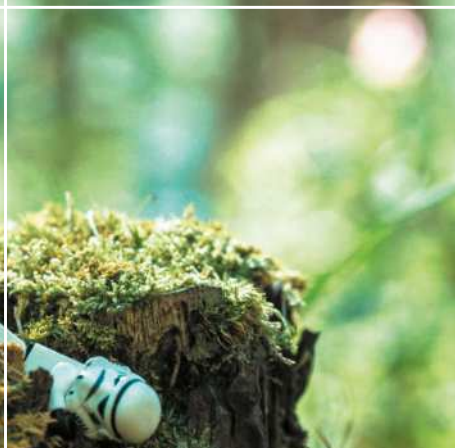
'Our mission is to recognise and acknowledge the hard work of toy photographers,' Otto concludes. 'We have a squad of eight toy photographers that actually visit Instagram accounts and nominate creative and interesting toy photos to be featured. Each of us has a different point of view. In fact, we specifically reached out to find a LEGO photographer, and we are lucky to have @swiss_brick as part of the squad. With him on board, we now have more LEGO photography featured on @toypic_community.' ■

Chris tries to add humour to his shots to help them connect with his audience.



Instagram pictures
are traditionally
in a 1:1 ratio.

Chris is prolific on
the social media
platform.



Price: £249.99, \$299.99, €269.99 / **Minifigures:** N/A / **Pieces:** 3,898

10272 OLD TRAFFORD - MANCHESTER UNITED

Is the first real-life LEGO football stadium a slam dunk, or simply par for the course? We'll stop mixing metaphors and find out

Words and Pics: Chris Wharfe

The cantilever roof is repetitive, but ingenious.



FOR MOST OF its history, the LEGO Group has aimed for broad appeal in its products based on real-world locations and buildings. Few people could take umbrage with Big Ben, the Empire State Building or even the Taj Mahal being recreated in brick form. When it comes to Old Trafford, though, there's a large slice of the populace – namely any supporters of rival football teams – that will be instantly turned off by the subject matter.

That's a real shame, because this slice

of Manchester United memorabilia shoots and scores on nearly every front. As the striking black box art implies, it's effectively a LEGO crossover episode, sublimely fusing together the Creator Expert and Architecture themes more closely than any previous location-based set. That's evident too in the instruction manual, which delves deep into the history of the club, and more specifically, its home stadium. Old Trafford turns 110 years old in 2020, so there's plenty to draw

on.

And if you don't support the club, or even really know anything about it, you'll soon learn a thing or two from the build. Between each section of the model, the manual asks you to take a step back, pause, and read up on what you're about to put together next. It's a refreshing way of doing things compared to the Architecture skylines, which frontload the build with information on each of the portrayed structures. It makes it easier



The new windscreen and bow pieces are put to good use.



All those empty seats. Astana must be in town.



We're going to overlook our poor sticker alignment.



Microfigure trophies dot the exterior.



These cantilever supports are purely aesthetic.



The entire stadium is modular, so you can move it around easily.

to digest, and you're less reluctant to skip over it just to get stuck into the set.

When you do begin clicking the bricks together, you'll find a building experience unlike many – if any – others in the entire LEGO portfolio. A real-life stadium is brand new territory for the LEGO Group, and a stadium like Manchester United's is unique even within that spectrum. You only need to look to the cantilever roof for the proof. When the ground was selected to host matches for the 1966 World Cup, its owners decided to remove the pillars that obstructed unfortunate supporters' views. The architectural style took nearly three decades to implement across the entire stadium.

Thankfully, you'll take much less time to incorporate it into the LEGO version, although as it's here you'll find the set's most repetitive section, it could well feel like 30 years. As with almost every repetitive element of a LEGO set, it's a necessary evil – and you can't fail to be impressed by the fact that in the Stretford End and East Stand,

VERDICT

Recreating the complicated angles of Old Trafford was hardly an open goal, but the LEGO Group's played a blinder anyway.

92/100

the cantilever supports even mimic their real-life properties, stopping their lighter roofs from sagging. It's just one example of where 10272 provides new possibilities for designers to flex their architectural knowledge.

What's more, because this is effectively an exercise in microscale, Old Trafford is also packed with the kind of inventive techniques those miniaturised models are known for. Few LEGO models wield the brick so brazenly, combining pieces into shapes and angles that seem impossible at first glance, but 10272 does it in spades. Much of that feeling comes

from how unique this subject matter is for the Creator Expert theme, but that's not a criticism – if anything, it's the opposite.

All that said, Old Trafford does have one big bugbear. Aside from 12 1x4 dark nougat bricks with printed red doorways and the five large tiles used for the pitch, every other decorated element comes courtesy of a sticker. There are 72 in total, and while most of them are understandable given how unique they are, lining up the 'Manchester United' and 'Stretford End' lettering is as painstaking as sticker application comes.

Stickers aside, how you approach 10272 will essentially define your experience with it. If you're a diehard Red Devil, you'll find it's the trophy you've been longing for, and the perfect celebration of Manchester United's history. If you have no ties to the club, you'll still appreciate it for how refreshingly different it is to build. And if you have a deep, undying hatred for the club that precludes you from purchasing it? Well, you'll be the one missing out. ■

✓ **Pros:** Eye-catching, accurate recreation of Old Trafford. Interesting and engaging build ✗ **Cons:** Modular build, but just one big manual. Sticker overload

FLASHBACK



If you want a football set with a little more playability, consider hunting down 2002's 3425 Grand Championship Cup. Then figure out how to combine it with the detail of 10272, and send us pics.

BRICK SPOTLIGHT



The pitch uses one centre circle tile, along with two each of the other tiles. And they're all printed, suggesting more football stadiums could well be on the way.

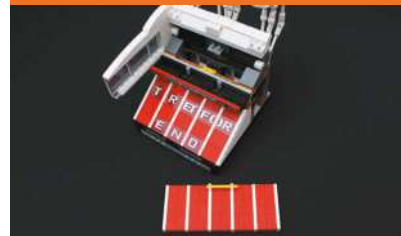
ESSENTIALS

BRICK SPOTLIGHT



The 1x10x3 windscreen and 1x4 transparent bow are both brand new in 10272, but you'll also find them in 10271 Fiat 500 – the set they were originally designed for.

TECHNIQUE SPOTLIGHT



The rows of seats are assembled using hundreds of red profile bricks, then clipped into place using bar elements. Gravity – and a few well-placed supports – do the rest. It's deceptively simple.

HOW YOU'LL SPEND YOUR TIME WITH 10272



i Price: £19.99, \$19.99, €24.99 / Minifigures: 1 / Pieces: 159

41250 TECHNO REEF DANCE PARTY

Like a well-intentioned teenage birthday celebration, this isn't a dance party anyone will be interested in attending

Words and Pics: Daniel Konstanski

VERDICT

A dance party with just one attendee is a miserable experience, but sums up this set.

45/100

ALMOST EVERY LEGO set is useful for parts, so for MOC builders, it's hard to truly regret an acquisition – but 41250 may come close for you. This is the runt of the Trolls litter for a litany of reasons.

First, the rest of the theme boasts a generous number of minifigures in each set considering the price. 41250 has only one.

Initially this seems offset by the fact that it is unique, but that is actually a problem. The mermaid tail element and hair pieces are only included in 41250, which means that this mermaid troll is completely orphaned. A school of them could be cool, but she is totally alone.

The set itself includes two models: a habitat

and DJ booth. The latter is the only saving grace. Among the many examples of DJ booths across the Friends and The LEGO Movie 2 themes, this is easily a cut above. The habitat lacks function, however, with only a slide that the mermaid doesn't even fit on. This set is an easy pass unless you are, for some reason, a Trolls completist.

If only it could fit down the slide.



Fire is always best stored in drawers.



The DJ booth is the only cool part of the set.



Party for... one.

Price: £19.99, \$19.99, €19.99 / **Minifigures:** 1 / **Pieces:** 103

41251 POPPY'S POD

A rare example of a 4+ set that doesn't look out of place next to its older siblings

Words and Pics: Daniel Konstanski

VERDICT

A much better value offering at this price point than the Dance Party.

80/100

41251 POPPY'S POD is a rarity among the 4+ range of sets, in that it does not feel like a step down in complexity from the rest of the theme. Depicting the home of the movie's protagonist, the set consists of three models: Poppy's pod home, a sentient flower, and a small cave with a treasure chest. Kids will find lots to love in the set itself, and fans of the theme will appreciate how it seamlessly adds to 41255 Pop Village Celebration.

Of the three pod homes that appear in the Trolls range, Poppy's here is the most complete. It includes a folding bed, dresser, sink and a variety of accessories, which can all be closed inside the hinged pod. The flower includes a pair of the new felt elements behind the printed face, and the cave can be used both as a closet or the finale of a quest.

For the price this set offers excellent value, especially for those who have the flagship Pop Village Celebration set, to which Poppy's pod can be added.

41251 looks great alongside other Trolls sets.



It's a rare 4+ set that doesn't feel like a step down.



Price: £29.99, \$29.99, €34.99 / **Minifigures:** 3 / **Pieces:** 250

41252 POPPY'S AIR BALLOON ADVENTURE

Poppy's Air Balloon flies high above the Trolls: World Tour range

Words and Pics: Daniel Konstanski

VERDICT

A stand-out set that transcends its theme. Don't overlook it.

88/100

THE TROLLS: WORLD Tour sets cater to a pretty specific audience: fans of the movie. Like Angry Birds and the recently-announced Minions, the LEGO Group is seeking to capitalise on a popular kids' movie with this one-shot theme. However, there's almost always a treasure within these product lines, which transcends the intended audience or confines of its source material to be excellent in its own right. 41252 Poppy's Air Balloon Adventure is that set for Trolls: World Tour.

Everything works with this set. Its price is spot on, especially considering the unique mould for the Biggie character. The new curved panel elements allow for a huge, perfectly sealed hot air balloon. The basket is big enough for the characters, and bursting with details that increase playability. 41252's only limiting factor is its colour palette – particularly the pink balloon elements, which will be difficult to adapt into other builds.

There is also only one small ancillary

model, which – while prone to being lost – does not feel like filler meant to increase the price point of the product. It is a metronome, which ties in perfectly with the musical arc of the film. With the small basket hanging beneath to add a bit of peril, there is just so much playability inherent in 41252. Kids will get plenty of enjoyment out of it, sending their Trolls on adventures to faraway places. This is a fantastic model with great value and therefore an easy recommendation.



41252 is bursting with playability and value.



This is the best Trolls set of the bunch.



Price: £24.99, \$29.99, €29.99 / **Minifigures:** 3 / **Pieces:** 173

41253 LONESOME FLATS RAFT ADVENTURE

VERDICT

Don't let the 4+ age mark put you off – there's a lot to love here.

78/100

A true rarity, Lonesome Flats Raft Adventure joins the exclusive club of 4+ sets that should appeal to an older demographic as well

Words and Pics: Daniel Konstanski

THE 4+ LABEL is often a sign of two things: simplified building techniques, and unrealistic blocky models intended to be easy for young hands. Somehow 41253 Lonesome Flats Raft Adventure seems to extend beyond that range. While certainly a simple build, it is more detailed than normal 4+ sets and fits in perfectly with the aesthetic of the rest of the Trolls theme. Simply put, 41253 is a great little set, and should be on your radar.

Along with being a lot of fun to play with, the various models are a treasure trove of parts – some of which are exclusive to this set, such as the large cowboy hat, legs on the horse troll, and the raft covers. The colours and size may limit their usefulness beyond this theme, but they are nonetheless decent parts. The jail and stage are simplified, but so are most of the builds in this theme, so again they don't feel out of place. Having a jail to lock bad

guys in adds a nice dose of variety to the Trolls theme, and three minifigures for a set this size adds excellent value.

Overall, this is a fantastic model that packs in play value, especially with the raft. The jail also adds something useful to the Trolls village that you can build if you get the whole theme. The only redundant or superfluous model is the stage, but this is the World Tour theme so its inclusion makes sense.



The raft is the highlight of the set.



Price: £34.99, \$39.99, €39.99 / **Minifigures:** 3 / **Pieces:** 387

41254 VOLCANO ROCK CITY CONCERT

Breaking aesthetically from the rest of the theme, 41254's punk rocker vibe will appeal to some and not to others

Words and Pics: Daniel Konstanski



41254 is the only Trolls set dedicated to a concert.



IN A THEME devoted to music performances, a stage was bound to be produced – but thankfully, the designers have turned what could have been a frustrating obligation into a great set. While not for everyone, these types of performance-oriented models can be very fun, and there is a lot to love with this one.

There isn't a lot of mystery in 41254; what you see is pretty much what you get. The idea with a product like this is for kids to be able to recreate concerts, and to that end everything

they need is here. Dual rotating turntables allow Poppy and her co-rocker to dance on stage. A highlight along with the stage is one of the best drum kits that the LEGO Group has produced to date. The set hasn't been short-changed in terms of minifigures either, with three in the box – including one that is unique – allowing for a full band to take the stage without the need for any other purchases. Additional value comes in the form of small dressing room

areas adjacent to the stage, which increases playability even more.

Detailed and with lots of accessories, this is by far the most concert-oriented set of the wave, meaning it fills a very important place in a theme built around a travelling musician. There is, however, very little crossover. This

is a set that is unapologetically trying to do one job well. If you or your kids aren't looking for a stage set, there is no reason to spend your money here.

VERDICT

Plenty of playability and great details make this a gig worth attending.

79/100

The colours and aesthetic are unique within the theme.



Price: £44.99, \$49.99, €49.99 / **Minifigures:** 4 / **Pieces:** 380

41255 POP VILLAGE CELEBRATION

The largest set of the Trolls: World Tour theme is the complete package – but while its parts are versatile, the final model isn't

Words and Pics: Daniel Konstanski

AS THE FLAGSHIP set of the line, 41255 is the biggest Trolls set by a wide margin in terms of footprint. Unfortunately, it is hamstrung by its aesthetic and source material. Some of the other models in the theme could be used beyond Trolls, but not this one.

However, as the village of the Trolls theme it does its job well – very well. Building this model feels very similar to assembling a doll house. The various rooms are outfitted with a tonne of little details that make for hours of easy and fun play. The tree from which the house pods can hang is larger than expected,

and those same pods can be detached for easy access. All the pods are constructed of brand new, large transparent elements, which are hinged and can be locked closed.

It will be interesting to see the clever builds fans create with these pods. They won't have a wide number of uses, as their size and shape limit them, but there will surely be some unique and spectacular applications – and the light blue version that 41255 includes is undoubtedly the most versatile of the three colours they currently come in. Combined with Poppy's Pod, the village really comes together with homes for three

of the main characters. Kids will love the play options and adults will find some of these elements useful.

The interior of the tree contains a kitchen and a spider hole, with the friendliest arachnid you will ever encounter. The best part of the tree and all these little rooms are the colours of the elements, which are sure to make teal lovers rejoice. Kids will love all the rooms, details and generous selection of troll figures, with four in total – more than any other set in the theme. Truly, everything you need from the Trolls: World Tour theme can be acquired in just 41255.

VERDICT

Whether you're after playability or parts, there's something here for everyone.

77/100



41255 will be a lot of fun for fans of the Trolls movie.

Price: £34.99, \$39.99, €39.99 / **Minifigures:** 2 / **Pieces:** 395

41256 RAINBOW CATERBUS

In a theme full of location-based sets, the Rainbow Caterbus stands out – and not just for its lurid colour scheme

Words and Pics: Daniel Konstanski

IT'S SAFE TO say that there has never been a LEGO set quite like 41256 Rainbow Caterbus. The LEGO Group has used bugs as inspiration before – look no further than the Insectoids theme from the late '90s – but none have been close to this colourful.

41256 is a set of two halves: some of it is excellent, and some of it is needless filler, intended to boost the piece count and therefore the price point. The Caterbus itself is a delightful little vehicle with room for the trolls inside, which is no small feat considering

their 'unique' proportions. It's also made up of some clever building techniques – especially the mouth on the front bumper – and a variety of unique elements and colours, which make it an excellent parts pack. If the bus and figures were all this set contained and it was half the price, it would be a nearly perfect offering.

The problem comes from the bus station and swing, because they're completely superfluous. This has been a common trend in themes over the last several years, and while not an instant death knell, it's an approach

that's very easy to get wrong. At best they are far too easy to lose since they are not connected to each other, and at worst they are filler. Such is the case here. If you have all the Trolls sets a small village is possible, but the bus station feels completely unnecessary. This set at half the price with just the bus would have been a much better product.

Thankfully, the bus is fantastic, which raises its overall standing – making 41256 Rainbow Caterbus half of a great set, with a lot of play value baked in.

VERDICT

The bus is a treat, but the station and swing are just unnecessary.

64/100



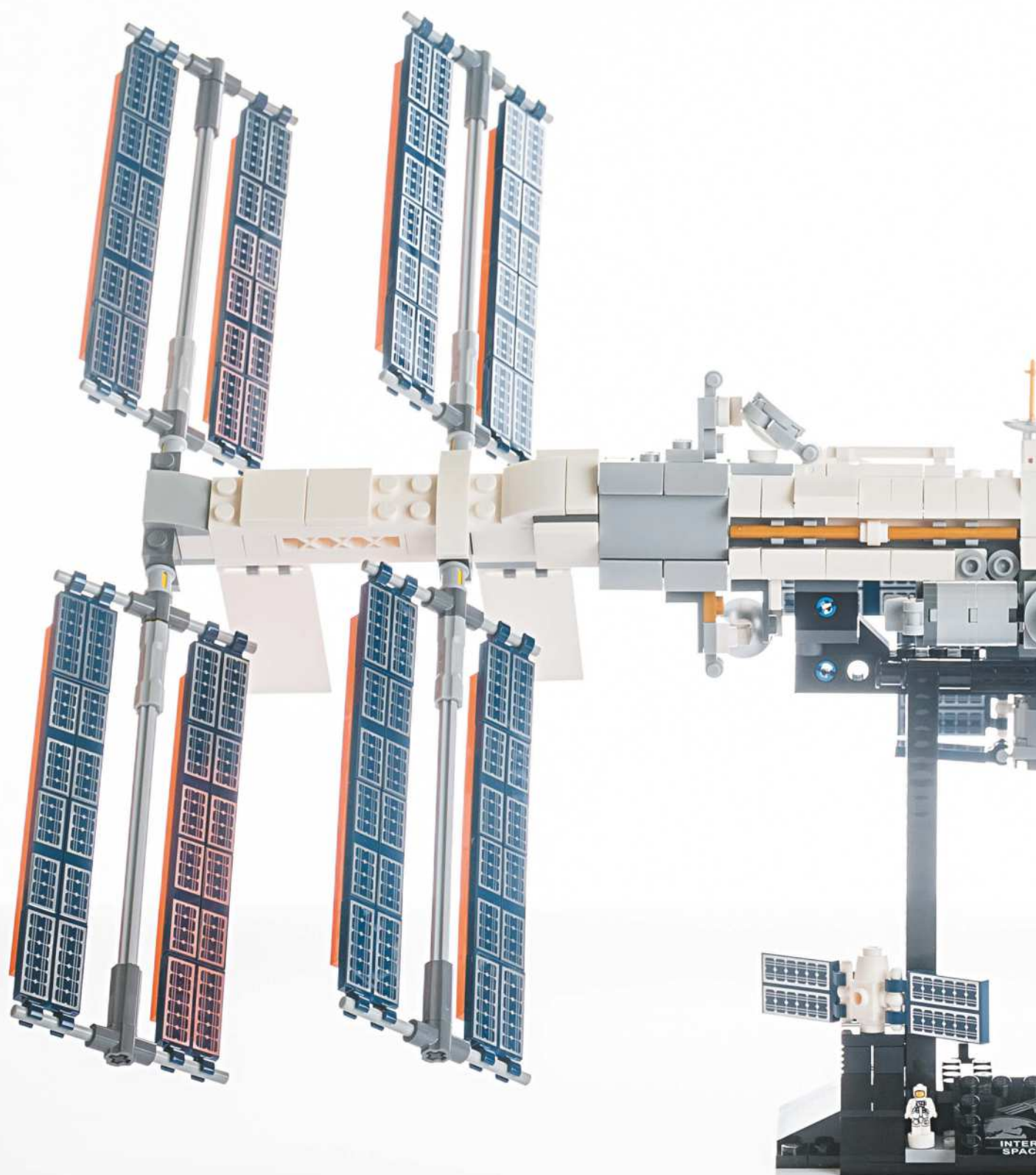
The bus is a fantastic model.

Price: £64.99, \$69.99, €69.99 / **Minifigures:** N/A / **Pieces:** 864

21321 INTERNATIONAL SPACE STATION

Is a brick-built space station such a brilliant Idea?

Words: David Cartledge **Pics:** Phil Wrighton



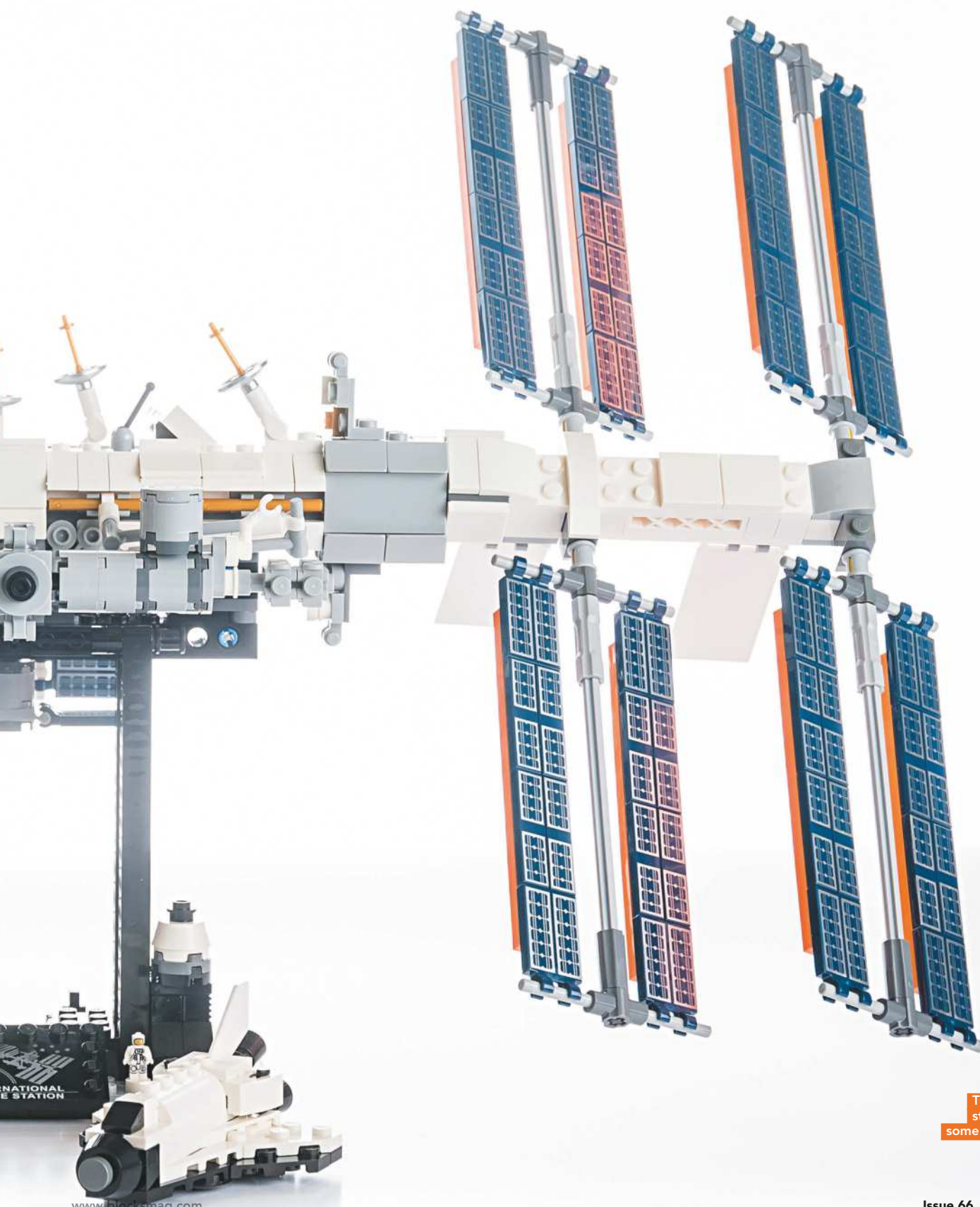
FOR OVER TWO decades, the International Space Station (ISS) has been a focal point of space research and cooperation between nations. The largest spacecraft ever built is given the brick treatment as the LEGO Ideas range celebrates its 10th anniversary, but is it a worthwhile set?

From looking at the finished model there may be one immediate question, so let's


THE BUILD IS REMINISCENT OF THE ISS ITSELF, IN THAT EVERYTHING IS MODULAR ■ ■

address that now: there are no stickers in this set. Even the nameplate is printed, as well as the seemingly endless collection of solar panels.

The build is reminiscent of the ISS itself in that everything is modular, designed to attach to an existing section of the craft. The downside to this approach is that with so many new modules being added, there is no



The display stand gives some structure.



The large solar panel arrays dominate the set.

■ ■ THIS IS A SET FOR
SERIOUS SPACE FANS ■ ■

Great detailing,
if you know what
those pieces are.

indication of exactly what it is you're making. Anyone but the most knowledgeable ISS aficionado will doubtless struggle to recognise if that white 2x2 round brick with solar panels you just added is an important lab, or a living module, or something else entirely.

As the pages pass by, you find you've created a dozen or so of these small elements and joined them on to the main body of the ISS and then, suddenly, it starts to take a more recognisable shape.

There's plenty of detailing too, which is difficult at this scale without it becoming greebling, but every tile, clip or bar is a real-life element of the ISS, and so has a real-life

purpose. Again, it's something that anyone but the most well-read space enthusiast will need to Google, but details like the posable Canadarm2, which connects to the accompanying mini spacecraft, are more obvious.

The build is completed with the 16 enormous solar panel arrays. It's a chore to put all of these together, but the end result is dramatic enough to make up for it. Once attached to the ISS, they visually bring the model together and really stand out, albeit only when viewed from the printed side.

VERDICT

A large, but largely unexciting build. One for space enthusiasts or collectors only.

62/100

This is unashamedly a display piece, and a smart stand helps the overall aesthetic, although the sturdiness and exposed pins leave something to be desired. It's a large set too, almost half a metre wide, but the scale is confused by the addition of two microfigure astronauts – as seen in 21309

NASA Apollo Saturn V – that don't match either the station or additional craft.

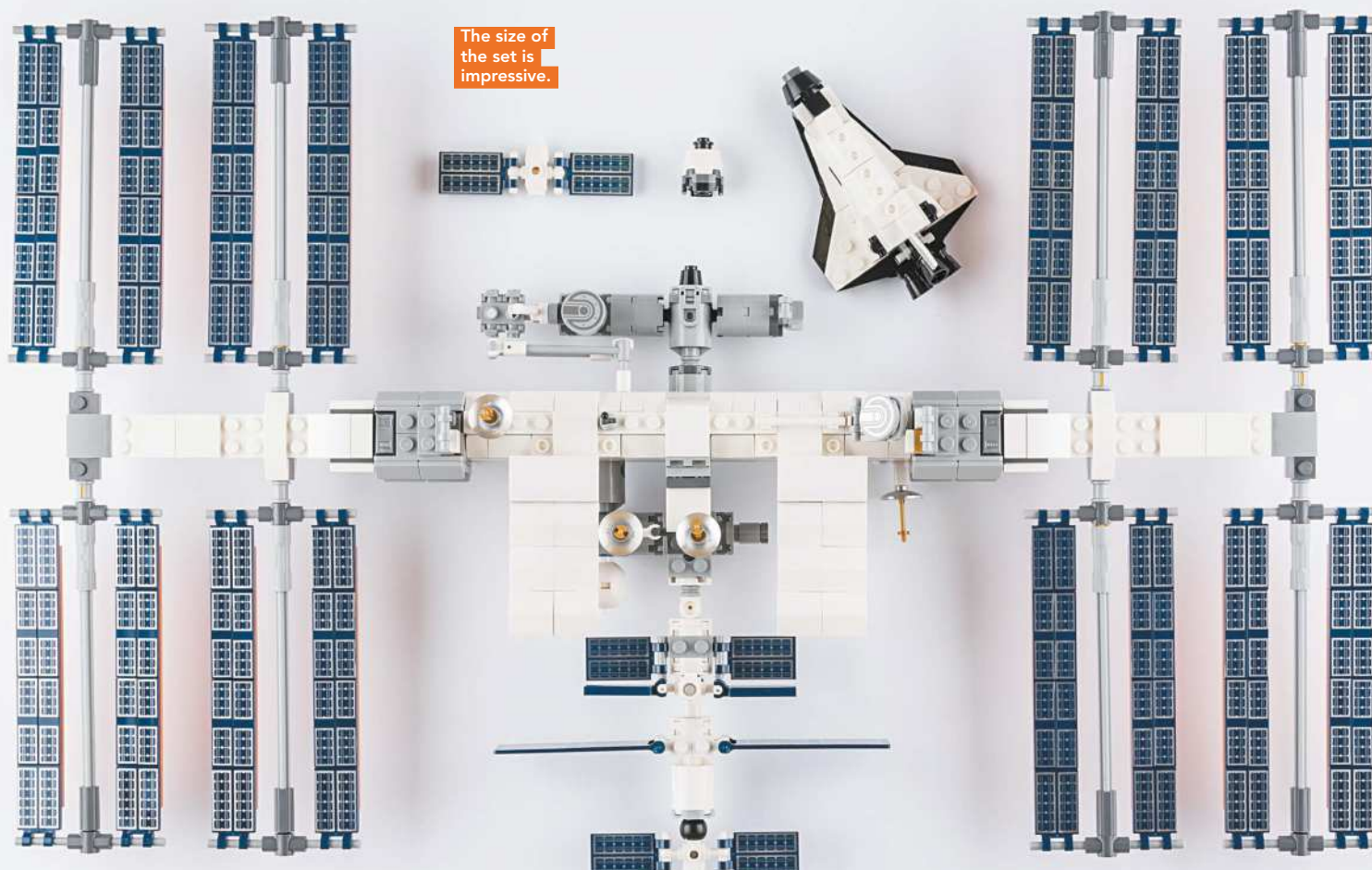
This is a set for serious space fans, and looks great alongside the existing range, but for anyone else it's a more difficult recommendation. ■



All printed, thank goodness.



The Canadarm2 is one of the few movable features.



The size of the set is impressive.

INSECTS AND IMAGING: PROBLEM SOLVING WITH LEGO

Dr. Steen Dupont explains how LEGO elements can be the perfect prototyping tool

Words: Graham Hancock Pics: The LEGO Group, Dr. Steen Dupont, Graham Hancock

Dr. Steen Dupont is an entomologist.



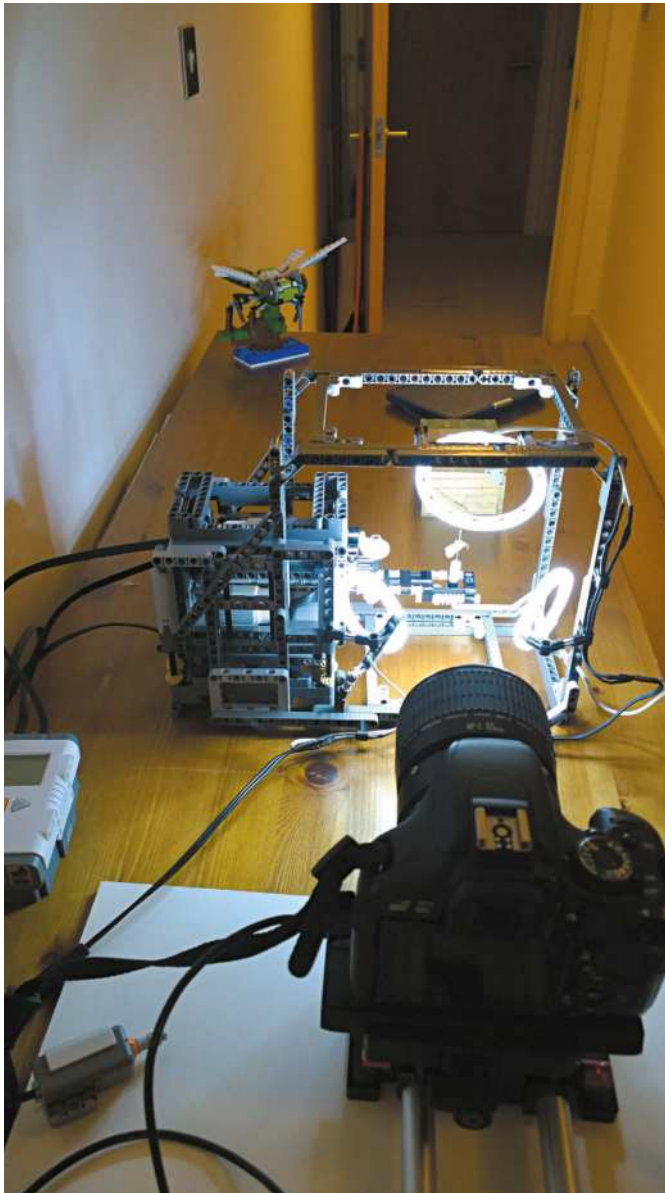
DEEP IN LONDON'S Natural History Museum sits a collection of over 34 million insects and arachnids, making it one of the foremost places in the world to research the miniscule creatures. It's there that Dr. Steen Dupont works in the Digital Collections Programme, imaging these specimens for study. And he's using a non-traditional tool in his work, having brought it with him from Denmark – the LEGO brick.

Entomology is the name given to the study of insects, and it is Steen's field. 'I study moths,' he explains. 'Mainly I specialise in a family called Limacodidae or slug moths, which is a family of moths that are pests on tea, coffee and palm oil. I study both their evolution and their form and function – so what they look like, why they look like that, how they have come to look like that.'

The main technique used for presenting and discussing a form is imaging. 'Imaging is really important, because describing something three-dimensional to someone is always tricky, unless it's square – if it's a cube people have a fairly good idea of what that is. But if it's something that coils up or twists and turns, or has wings that tend to fold quite intricately like origami, and trying to explain where those folding points are on the wing... you can do it, but that is a lot of terminology.'

'If you have an image, you can just say, 'It folds there, there, there and it folds like that.' That becomes a lot easier to process and a lot more standardised, so you can start comparing across several specimens or several species. Imaging is used as data.'

■■■ THERE IS A LOT OF WORK THAT GOES INTO JUST BUILDING SOMETHING, ADDING SOME PIECES AND SORT OF BUILDING UP FROM THERE INSTEAD OF HAVING A CLEAR IMAGE IN MY MIND OF WHAT I WANT ■■■



Steen works in the Natural History Museum's Imaging Lab, figuring out how to photograph specimens in the most efficient way. With millions of individual insect specimens in the collection, being able to digitise them quickly is key. This is where the LEGO comes in.

'Putting LEGO into my work was a reaction to moving away from Denmark. When I was in Copenhagen, I had a workshop with access to tools and stuff. If I built something, I would usually prototype it in metal, wood or something else. When I moved to England, I left that behind, so I got a connection back by starting to play with LEGO.'

This was the second time in the Dane's life that LEGO building had provided a connection with home. 'My early experience was a massive

■ ■ WHAT I DISCOVERED IS THAT TECHNIC IS A PROTOTYPING TOOL

room full of LEGO in my mum's house when I was six,' he remembers. 'We had just moved to Africa and we had this massive collection. I remember that we had them in bedsheets – it was easier to tidy up. You play with LEGO on a bedsheet, then you just bunch it all up and you tie a knot. Those were conventional LEGO bricks; then as I started being more interested in mechanics and solution-driven (rather than model-driven) challenges, I moved over to Technic.

'What I discovered is that Technic is a prototyping tool. It's modular, it's very precise, and it has fantastic load-bearing capabilities. It's made of a non-reactive plastic, so I can use LEGO straight on to a lot of the specimens that we have.'

Steen is effusive in his praise of the humble bricks, with one of the key attributes being that they can be reused for different devices. 'You don't have to keep buying the raw material. You buy a couple of sets and you have a good foundation for a workshop. You build and you rebuild... it does mean I don't have my prototypes, which of course is a bit annoying. I would love to have a shelf with all the stuff that I have built, but the fact is a lot of it gets taken apart, sometimes begrudgingly.'

While it's not entirely surprising that prototypes can be built in Technic, to be revisited in a more permanent fashion, it is a little more surprising that they often serve the purpose needed exactly as they are.

'We have the Imaging Lab here and a lot of the time we will have challenges that can be either solved quite quickly with a little piece here

Steen improves the concepts as he builds them.

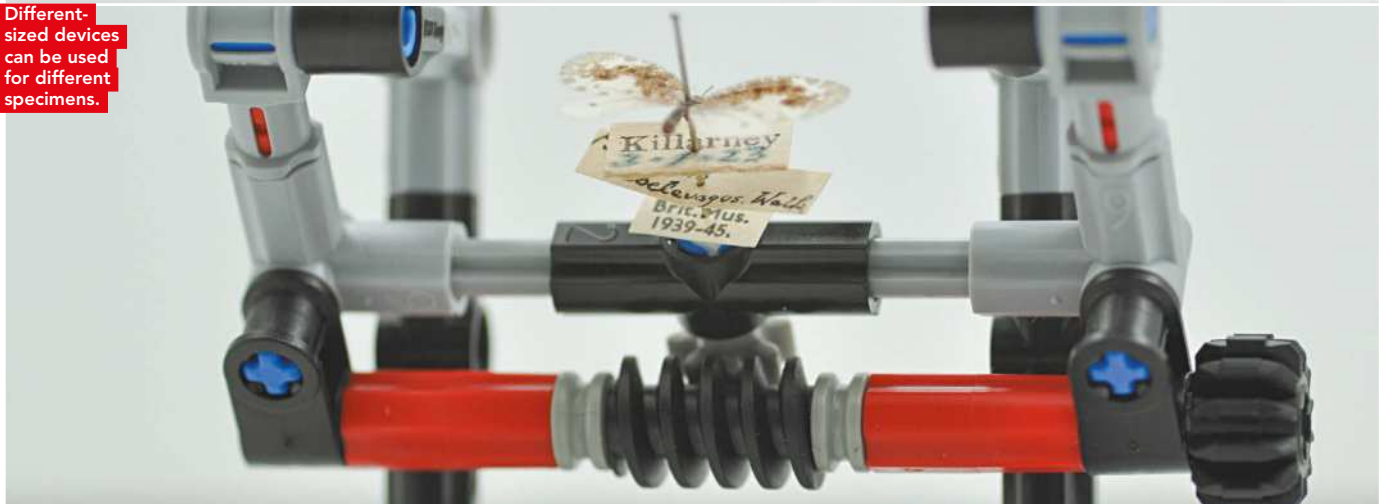


■■■ INSECTS AND IMAGING

Instructions for this device are available online.



Different-sized devices can be used for different specimens.

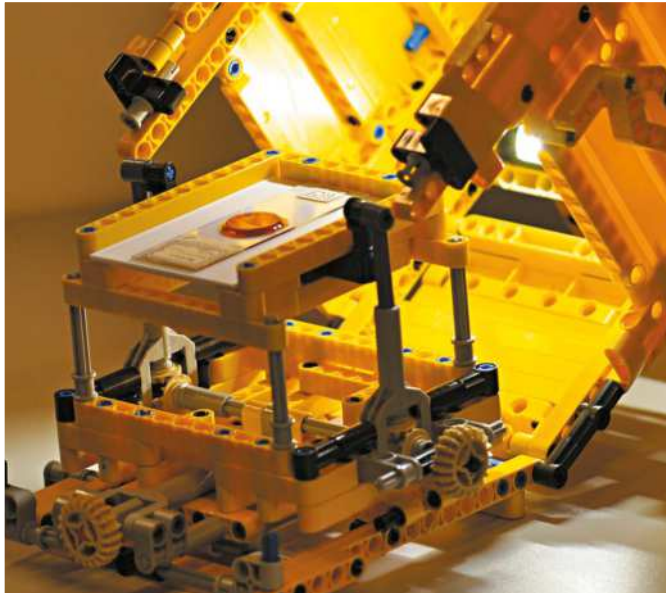
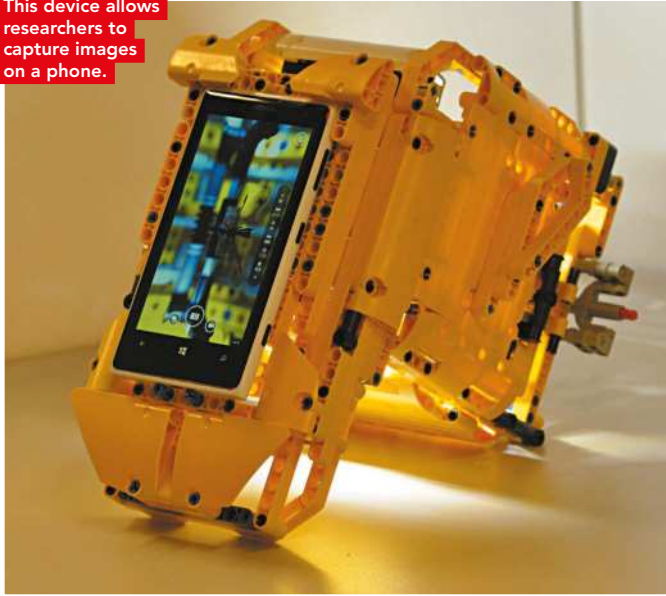


Different versions have been built over time.

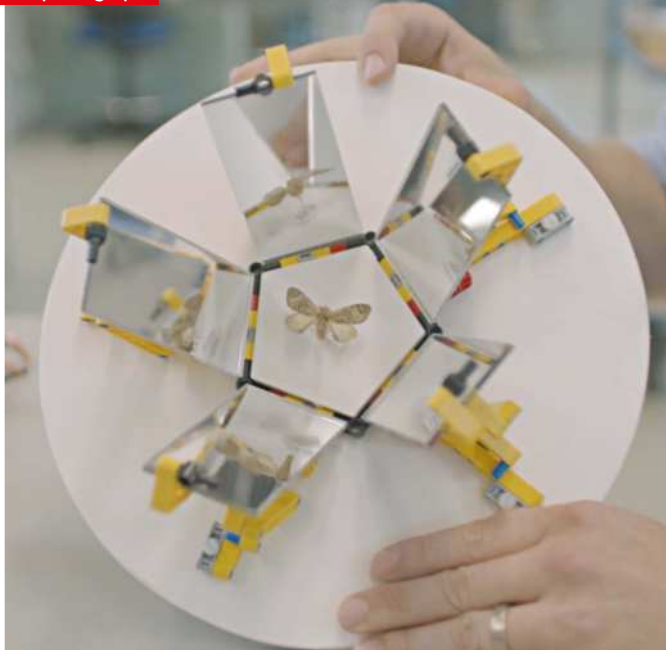
The insect manipulator in action.



This device allows researchers to capture images on a phone.



The MALICE allows for multiple angles to be taken with one photograph.



or a piece there, or a smaller contraption that will hold something,' Steen explains. 'Sometimes those prototypes and those solutions just become the solution. We do have an engineering shop here, but instead of having it made in something else, the solution is already there.'

With a project to digitise the millions of insect specimens underway, the entomologist conceived of the insect manipulator around three years ago. 'I spent a lot of time trying to build something we call a micro rail – it is essentially just a rail system that drives an object closer or further away from a lens, but a 20th of a millimetre at a time.'

'I take an image, drive something a fraction closer, then take another image, and finally compile all of those. There are machines that do that, but the challenge was to build it in LEGO so that I can put the specimen in, move it around, get my image, and then move the specimen closer or further from the lens as I take the images.'

After coming up with a design that he was happy with, Steen published online instructions showing how to build the tool. It received attention all around the world, and now those working with bugs are building their own insect manipulators using the design. Even students at the beginning of their career can order the necessary parts and have their own device.

'It was never meant to be something that we sold,' he says. 'It was meant to be, 'Here's something cool, here's how you build it, if you want it, go spend £5 on pieces and build it.' That was the idea. Even though we probably could have built it in a different material, we actually liked the idea that anybody could go online and without having a workshop, without having to use drills and screwdrivers and everything else, they could put together this solution.'

Fiddling away with his LEGO elements, the insect expert tries different concepts. 'I spent quite a lot of time trying to integrate LEGO with mobile phones, because one of the really useful things is being able to photograph things in the collection,' he explains. 'Instead of taking a lot of specimens out of our collection, it makes a lot more sense to take your phone, go into it and take the snapshots you need. I was building a lot of contraptions that attached to the phone so you could put the specimen in it and manipulate it in front of the lens, and take your images with lights and all kinds of things. That one was quite fun.'

'Some of them did work – the restriction wasn't LEGO, it was the cameras. Because the phone lenses are built as wide lenses, when you start adding other lenses to make it a macro lens you start encountering a lot of different problems.'

It's this willingness to try things out, to see what happens and be willing to fail, that allows the imaging professional to find some of these unorthodox solutions.

Another of the Technic enthusiast's creations is MALICE – Mirrored Angled Label Imaging Capture and Extraction. Currently, to photograph

■ ■ YOU BUY A COUPLE OF SETS AND YOU HAVE A GOOD FOUNDATION FOR A WORKSHOP ■ ■



an insect specimen, all the labels must be removed and lined up before a picture can be taken. It takes around two and a half minutes each time.

‘Considering we have about 25 million, that’s a lot of time,’ Steen says. ‘What we can do is take a specimen and then take images of it from six different angles, then extract the label digitally and reconstruct it. Instead of taking them off, you’re just going click, click, click – that brings it down to about 30 seconds.’

‘We built that, we have it in the lab now. But there is a step further. Instead of using six cameras, and about £30,000, you take one camera and you have the specimen sitting in the middle and the camera above, so you get all the angles you need from the mirrors. Then you take one image and you extract the labels from the mirror images. To do that and to understand what the optimal degree of the mirrors is and whether it actually works, I built the MALICE.

‘The MALICE in LEGO is nice and adjustable, and I can scale it in and out as I want. It allows us to prove the concept, and it works. We’re working on a paper on it soon and we might never change it, because honestly it works.’

It’s not just his own field that Steen builds devices for, though, with other colleagues calling in his LEGO bricks for different projects. ‘A lot of the



researchers and curators will come to the lab trying to do something, and we will just chat to them about it,’ he explains. ‘Nobody is averse to doing something easier, or trying to simplify what they’re already doing.’

This happened recently when his colleagues received a grant to image some very old books, with the challenge being that the books needed to be held open so that they could be photographed – without being damaged, of course.

‘Essentially it boiled down to having the book stay open with the smallest possible footprint on the book, and whatever you put on the pages has to be able to be at several different locations. These are herbarium books, so pressed plants. An adventurer has been around the world collecting material, but he hasn’t put them in the same spot. A plant might have a leaf up in the corner, or all the way to the margin. Having something that just plonks down on the page is not useful because you won’t be able to use it – you need something that you can move around.’

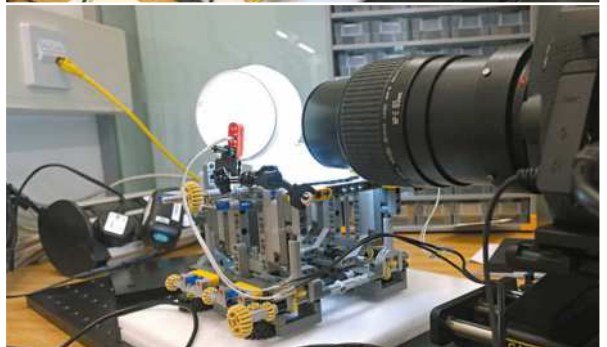
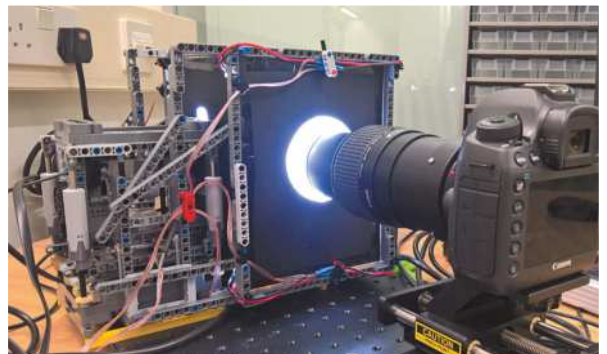
The resulting contraption uses a series of Technic beams and pins. ‘It has to hang off the book, but also apply weight, as you would do with your thumb,’ Steen continues. ‘It was very nerve-wracking, because I was testing it on a 300-year-old book. It used to have rubber gloves on it, but it’s a perfectly safe material; it doesn’t interact. Metal wouldn’t work, because it will sometimes leave marks or react with whatever is on the paper, whereas ABS is actually a fairly good material.’

‘It’s really cool to make something that is out of your field. With insects it is completely within my field – I can design something for that because I know exactly how to deal with my specimens, but when you build it for something else you’re like, ‘Does that work? Will you ever use this?’ It was nice to see some confirmation that this was actually a good solution.

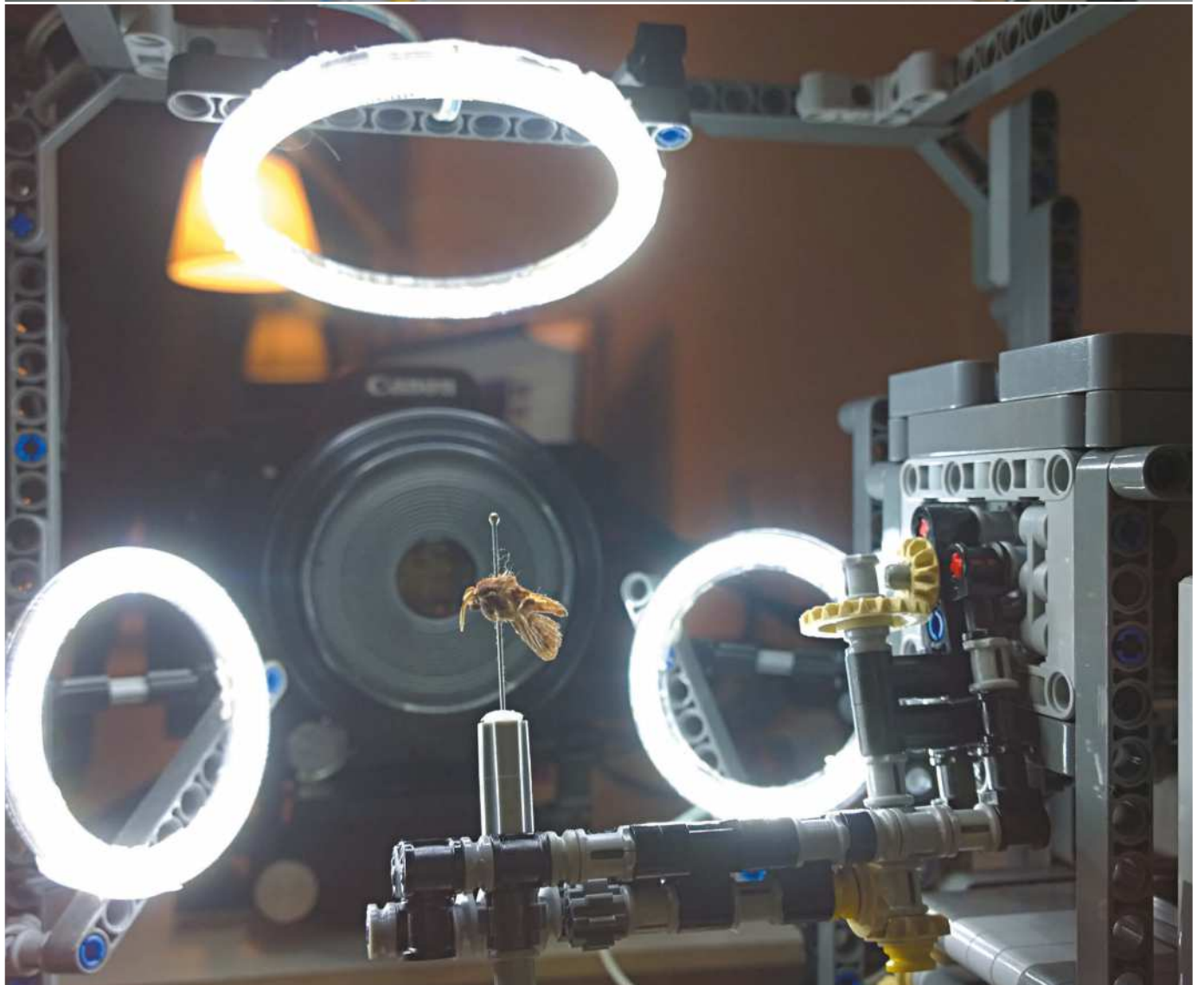
‘I probably don’t have the technical skill to envision and illustrate a solution, then go straight to something physical. There is a lot of work that goes into just building something, adding some pieces and sort of building up from there, instead of having a clear image in my mind of what I want.’

For all those occasions when LEGO building is dismissed as merely child’s play, Steen demonstrates that important work can be achieved with patience, a willingness to try different ideas and a bucket full of Technic bricks. It isn’t playing – it’s prototyping. ■

■■■ IT’S REALLY COOL TO MAKE SOMETHING THAT IS OUT OF YOUR FIELD; TO SEE SOME CONFIRMATION THAT THIS WAS ACTUALLY A GOOD SOLUTION ■■■



The LEGO arms are designed to hold open a book.



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BUILDING BLOCKS

THE HISTORY OF THE LEGO GROUP: THE 2010s

Our exhaustive tour through the brick company's past wraps up with a rollercoaster decade

Words: Daniel Konstanski Pics: The LEGO Group

IN 2010, THE LEGO Group posted the best results in the company's nearly 80-year history, with a pre-tax profit of just under DKK 3 billion. The next year would see the company payroll reach a number of employees three times that of 2004. Not only had the brand survived its spiral into near bankruptcy, it had come roaring back to market domination.

The LEGO Group's near-death experience had led Jørgen Vig Knudstorp and the company's other leaders to implement what was known as Shared Vision – a three-phase plan to save and rebuild the company. Phase

one and two were complete, having successfully stabilised the LEGO Group and built a core set of products that strictly adhered to the brick. That return to the core brought faithful fans and parents streaming back and, as the record profit levels of 2010 showed, they were ready to spend – despite the global financial crisis. The LEGO Idea had been reborn for a new era.

'In 15 years, I think we will see radically different LEGO than today, but it will build on the same idea,' Jørgen said at the time. 'LEGO is timeless and universal. Americans perceive LEGO as an essential part of American culture. Many other countries also believe in having the honour of LEGO. It's just fine that everyone can reflect on it and say that this is an expression of our culture. It shows the durability of the idea.'

As the decade turned, it was time for the third and final phase of Shared Vision: growth. However, the LEGO Group had learned its lesson from the ill-fated efforts to achieve that same goal in the late '90s.

Rather than replace the brick with other products that would open up new markets, it sought instead to find uses or expressions for the brick in the various other markets it wanted to pursue. This led to a lot of experimentation and pushing the envelope, but with a key difference: this time around, everything was in service to the brick.

An example of how this played out in practice can be seen with the different approach to television. The LEGO Group's previous attempt, Galidor, tried to lead with a show and shoehorn products in behind it – products that ultimately looked nothing like LEGO bricks. This time, the company started with a hit product, like NINJAGO, and then supported it with a hit show. The brick always came first. There was a lot of experimentation during the 2010s, as the LEGO Group sought to keep the engine of growth firing. Some of it worked, and some of it didn't – but succeed or fail, the products were all focused on the brick.

LEGO Universe, a massive multiplayer online game (MMOG), launched to much fanfare in 2010. The game would only last until 2012, but represented a bold approach to an avenue for digital bricks. In the two years that followed the game's launch, a trio of product families were established that are still successful to this day.

The first was upgrading CUUSOO – the crowdsourcing platform that was the forerunner of what is now LEGO Ideas – to a global market after a pilot period in Japan. Ideas has now become a darling of the

■ ■ THERE WAS A LOT OF EXPERIMENTATION TO KEEP THE ENGINE OF GROWTH FIRING ■ ■

AFOL community, having given us legendary sets of the past decade like 21311 Voltron, 21309 NASA Apollo Saturn V, and 21109 Exo-Suit. The second was NINJAGO, the first – and arguably only truly successful – Big Bang theme. That first wave included the now-famous spinners, which were banned from many schoolyards due to distracting kids with their addictive gameplay.

Finally, the hugely successful Friends line arrived on shelves in 2012, after years of research and development into how the brick could more closely connect with girls and their styles of play. Both Friends and NINJAGO are known within the LEGO Group as top-level product categories, which means they can cost hundreds of millions of pounds to launch. They were risky experiments, but they were heavily supported by the extensive research and development arm that had been gutted, reimagined and reborn in the years since near-bankruptcy. All three of these product families are still with us and would, along with Star Wars and Super Heroes, largely define the product line during the 2010s.

The success of these products, and the entire portfolio, led to the LEGO Group overtaking Hasbro in 2013 to become the second-largest toymaker in the world. To support its range of experiments, the company spent £62 million in research and development, and employed nearly 12,000 full-time employees across the globe. Little did anyone know, however, that things were about to get even better.

In February 2014, the fruit of a partnership with Warner Brothers was released to the big screen. The LEGO Movie became a cultural phenomenon and blockbuster hit with moviegoers across the world. The company quickly found itself at the centre of the cultural zeitgeist. Adults who had not thought about the brick in years were suddenly

The LEGO House opening was a major event of the 2010s.



The LEGO House celebrates the company's history and ideals.





THE HISTORY OF LEGO

Billund's factories enjoyed modernisation and expansion during the 2010s.



Automation has been key to the company's growth.

streaming into local LEGO Stores with their kids. Sales skyrocketed, and first-half profits for the year reached £210 million, on a revenue of a staggering £1.56 billion. Those colossal sales numbers allowed the LEGO Group to take the crown of the world's leading toy manufacturer, dethroning Mattel in the process.

However, the first bump in the growth train was coming. Megahits like these are impossible to maintain, as the LEGO Group discovered when the next film in the LEGO Cinematic Universe, *The LEGO Batman Movie*, failed to achieve the same success as its predecessor – with a correspondingly lower demand for tie-in products. The expectation of blockbusters and years of double-digit growth had come together to add a lot of complexity and size to the organisation. Once again, the LEGO Group had grown cumbersome: size had been added to meet the increased demand, but that demand was not sustainable over the long haul.

2017 brought an 8% drop in revenue, marking the first year with no growth since the crisis of 2004. That reality led to a new strategic plan called *Simplify to Grow*. Its purpose was to reignite growth by regaining commercial momentum and simplifying the organisation, by instilling speed, simplicity, innovation, productivity and a sense of ownership. Unfortunately for many, the first tangible application of this new

■ ■ THE QUEST TO MERGE DIGITAL PLAY EXPERIENCES WITH THE BRICK TOOK CENTRE STAGE ■ ■

initiative was an 8% cut in the workforce, in order to trim it to a size more in line with realistic growth expectations. 1,400 people lost their jobs.

‘We are very sorry to make changes which may interfere with the lives of many of our colleagues,’ Jørgen said at the time. ‘Our colleagues put so much passion into their work every day and we are deeply grateful for that. Unfortunately, it is essential for us to make these tough decisions. We will build a smaller and less complex organisation than we have today, which will simplify our business model in order to reach more children.’

This rollercoaster of business performance wasn't the company's only defining factor in the 2010s, though, as the quest to merge digital play experiences with the brick also took centre stage. LEGO Fusion stalled out of the gate in 2014, joining LEGO Universe in the list of failed experiments. However, the expansive catalogue of TT Games titles, which have spanned franchises from *Star Wars* to *The Incredibles* to *Indiana Jones*, were decidedly more successful. The latest experiment, *Hidden Side* – which takes advantage of augmented reality technology – is still ongoing, but has been well-received thus far. This is a major area of focus for the LEGO Group, and it will be interesting to see the ways the company explores it in future.

Licensing expanded dramatically in the 2010s as well. The early 2000s was marked by a few major licences, centred on the huge cultural touch points of *Harry Potter* and *Star Wars*. During the last decade, it seemed like almost anything with pop culture potential got a LEGO line. *Angry Birds*, *Stranger Things*, *Ghostbusters*, *The*



Sustainability is a major goal for the company.

THE FOCUS WILL REMAIN ON DIGITAL INNOVATION AND SUSTAINABILITY

Simpsons and many more were all immortalised in the brick.

That brings us to today. A new decade has started; one in which the LEGO Group will turn 90 years old. It is truly an amazing accomplishment to have not only survived, but in fact risen to the top of the cultural relevancy mountain – a triumph that would surely amaze Ole Kirk, the humble carpenter who started the company so many years ago. Furthermore, the company remains in the hands of the Kirk Kristiansen family, with fourth-generation owner Thomas taking over as deputy chairman of the board from his father in 2016, and moving up to chairman just last month.

But even as we look to the past, the LEGO Group is constantly looking toward the future. In the years to come, the focus will remain on digital innovation, coupled with a new drive towards sustainability. So yes, we may have come to the end of our tale – but it's only because the story is still being written. ■

Dimensions was one of several digital products from the decade.

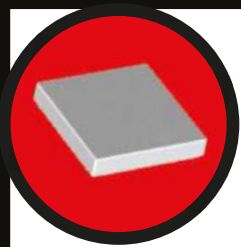


The Mexico factory exterior.



The moulding hall of the new Mexico factory.





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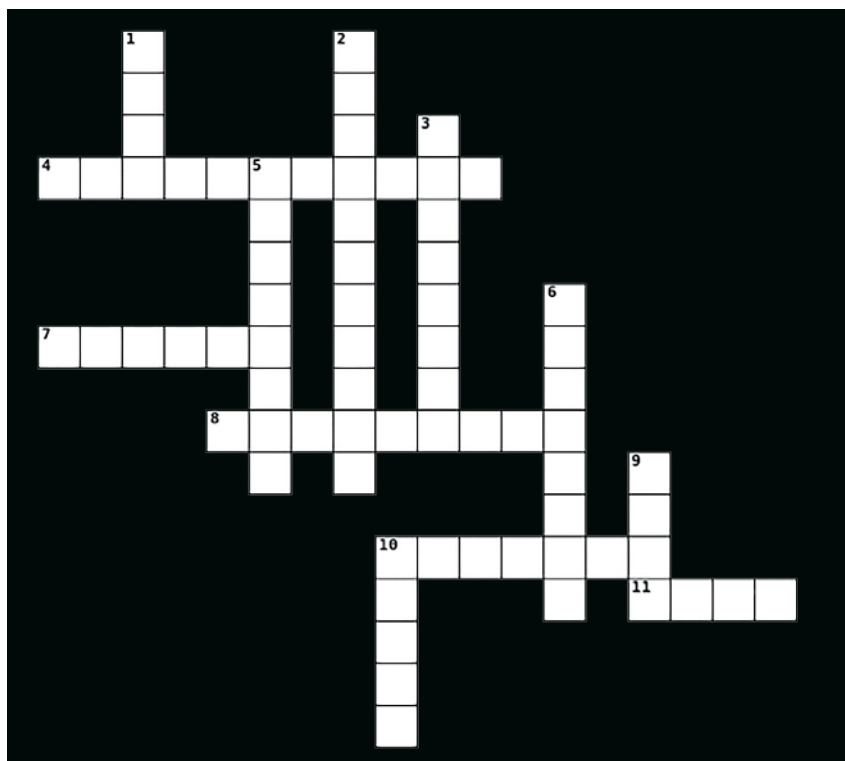
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Across

- 4.** Celebrating 10 years, first word (**11**)
7. LEGO MASTERS US host, second name (**7**)
8. Green hat-wearing outlaws (**9**)
10. Name of the LEGO Pirates monkey (**7**)
11. The original version of CITY (**4**)

Down

- 1.** LEGO MASTERS US host, first name (**4**)
2. Celebrating 10 years, second word (**11**)
3. Thompson's nickname in the Wild West (**8**)
5. The C in MOC (**8**)
6. Redbeard's scruffy doppelganger (**8**)
9. Latest LEGO Creator Expert car (**4**)
10. The S in SNOT (**5**)



LEGO ~ Sell it, Want it, Swap it!!

Is a worldwide Facebook group that was created over 6 years ago by a Mother & Son in order to bring together all LEGO enthusiasts to share in their creations.

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The group is carefully run with a strong friendly Admin team of 7, whom consistently monitor regular posts, always offering their best help and advice should you need them, in between accepting hundreds of new members daily from all corners of the world.

After agreeing to the rules, stressing "honesty & fairness" Members are then given the opportunity to either sell their unwanted LEGO, Swap it for something they desire, ask for parts or sets wanted, or simply just join in the fun to showcase your superb collection.

All for the Love of Bricks

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A detailed LEGO UCS Star Destroyer interior, showing a central corridor with grey walls and floor. Two figures stand at the top of the corridor: a brown-clad figure on the left and a blue-skinned figure in a white uniform on the right. Several grey-clad figures are seated at consoles on both sides of the corridor. The scene is illuminated by bright, even light.

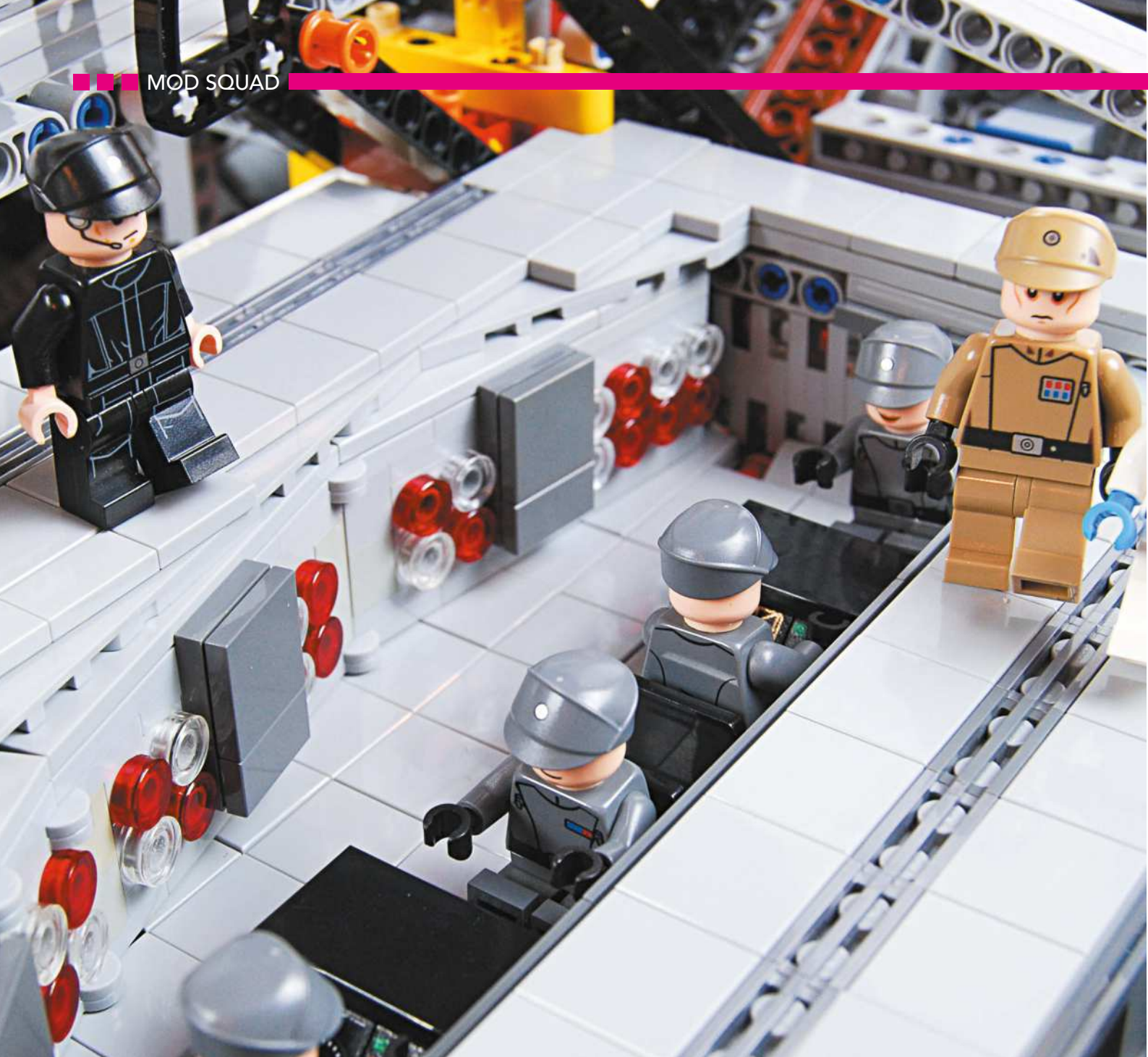
MOD SQUAD

UCS STAR DESTROYER

PART 3

The construction of the Star Wars icon's control pits continues at a pace to rival the Kuat Drive Yards

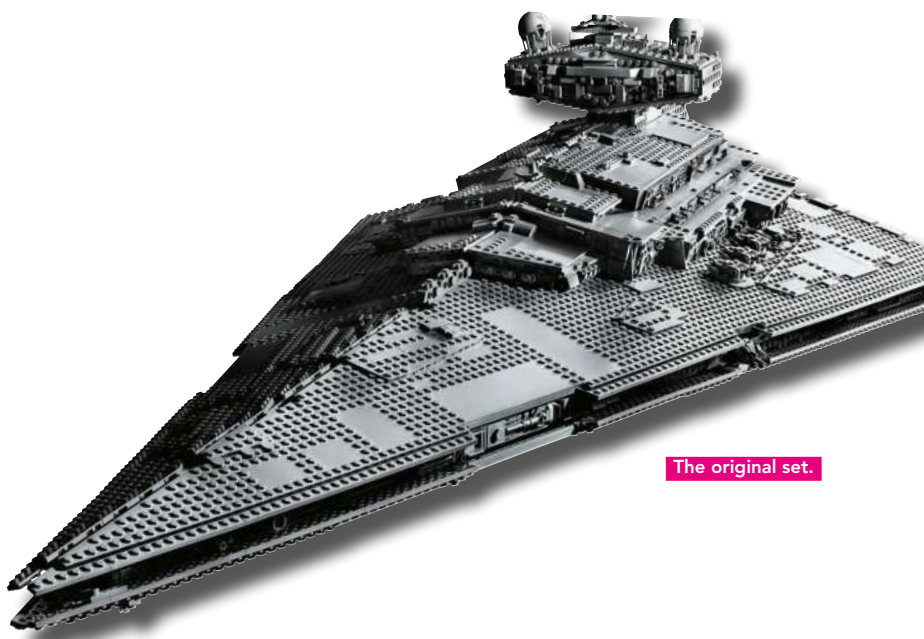
Words and Pics: Daniel Konstanski



THE LATEST STAR Wars behemoth is being tinkered with by the Mod Squad, with the hydrospanner sending sparks flying everywhere. The impressive 75252 Imperial Star Destroyer is being modified with an interior, adding play value to the enormous display model.

So far, we've given the set an interior foundation for all these new sections. The Probe Droid nook gives a spot for the Imperials to scour the galaxy, while the North Pit provides a place for the officers to press buttons and cast aspersions on Bounty Hunters.

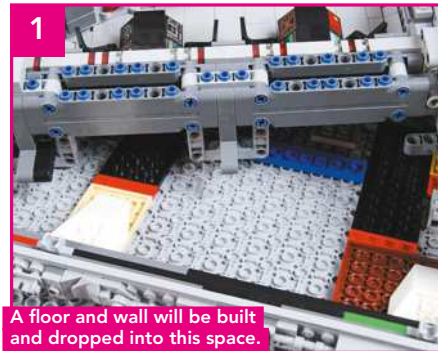
In this part of the project, the South Pit and Walkway are constructed. This will allow for the many movie scenes in which Darth Vader and the commanding Imperials give orders from above to those working below. No elements from the official model need to be removed for this modification.



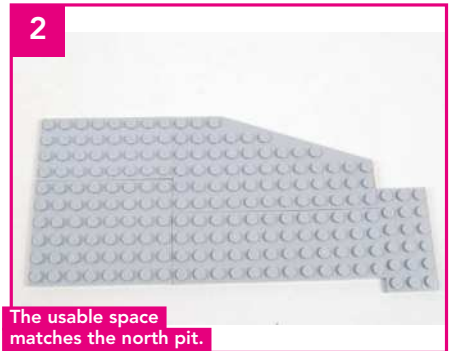
The original set.

THE SOUTH PIT

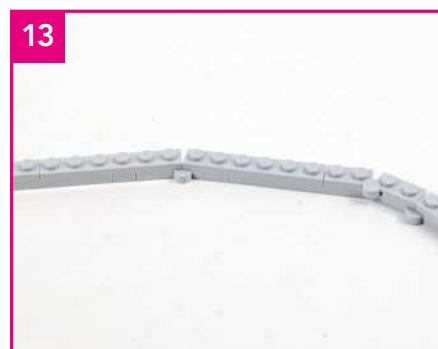
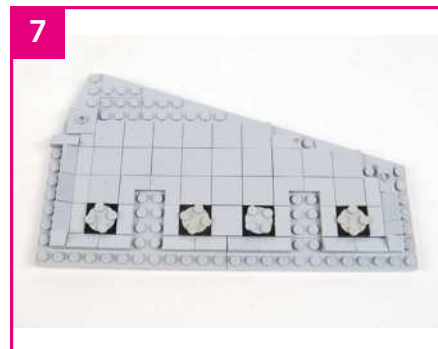
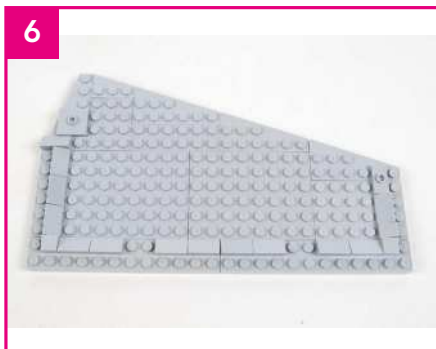
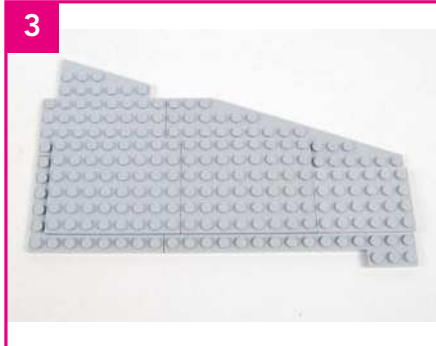
With the north side of the bridge completed last issue, we can jump across the central support to the south side. Height is at a bit more of a premium on this half, which necessitates some slight differences in construction from the north pit. However, the square footage is the same.

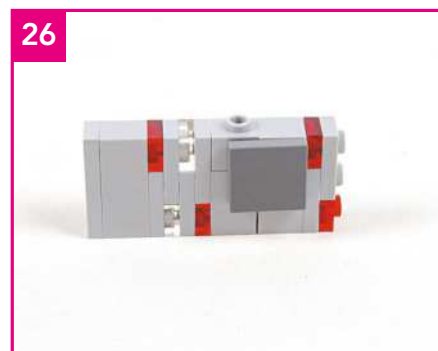
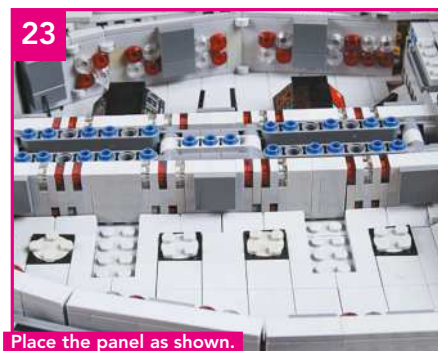
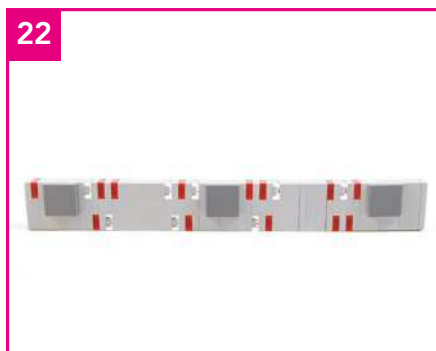
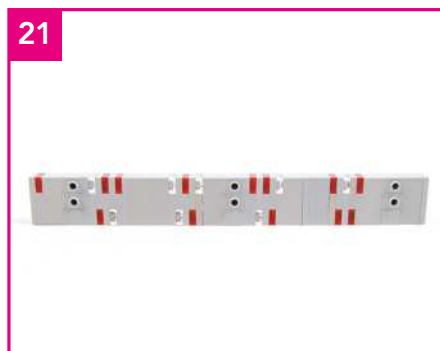
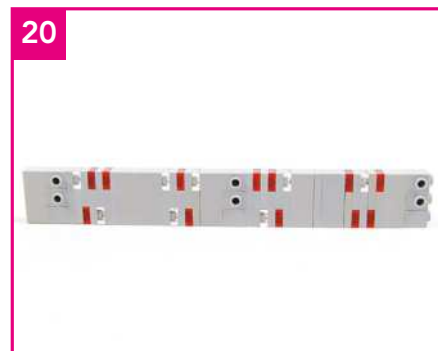
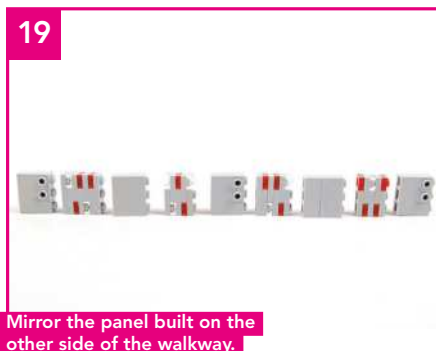


A floor and wall will be built and dropped into this space.



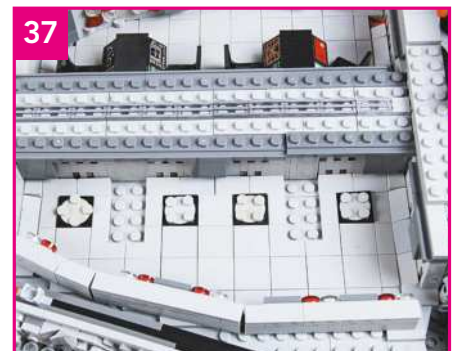
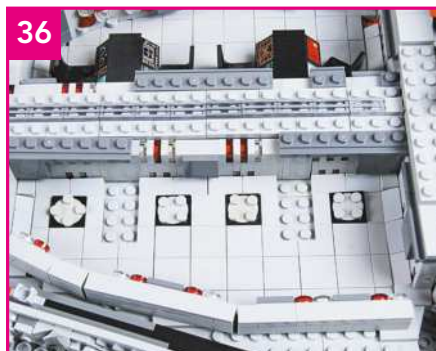
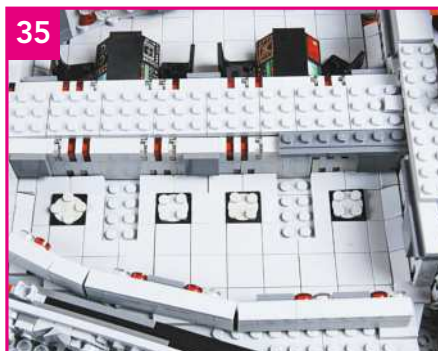
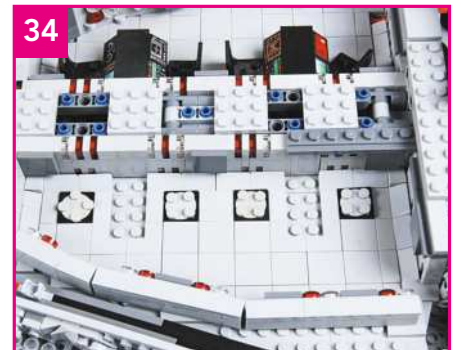
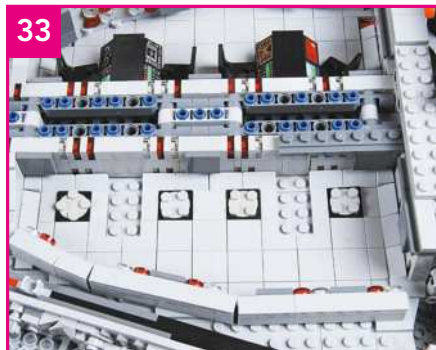
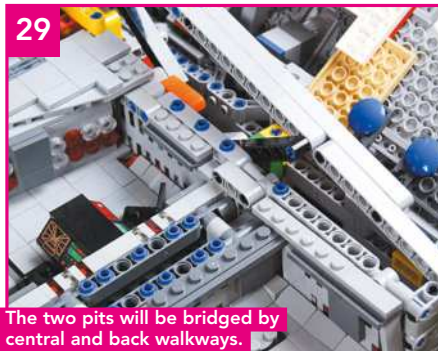
The usable space matches the north pit.





THE WALKWAY

With the pits complete, the final section of this part's modification is the central and rear walkways that connect the two pits. Modified plates are key elements to cover the walls of the pits, while not interfering with the officers at their consoles beneath.



COMPLETION

With both sides of the bridge complete, the entire build should join seamlessly with the Probe Droid nook from Part 1. The modification has been designed so that the panels for the Star Destroyer still fit above and amongst the various elements. Next month, it will be time to visit the other side of the Star Destroyer to add even more interior rooms.

■ ■ MODIFIED PLATES ARE KEY ELEMENTS TO COVER THE WALLS OF THE PITS, WHILE NOT INTERFERING WITH THE CONSOLES BENEATH ■ ■

This completes the modifications on one side of the Star Destroyer.

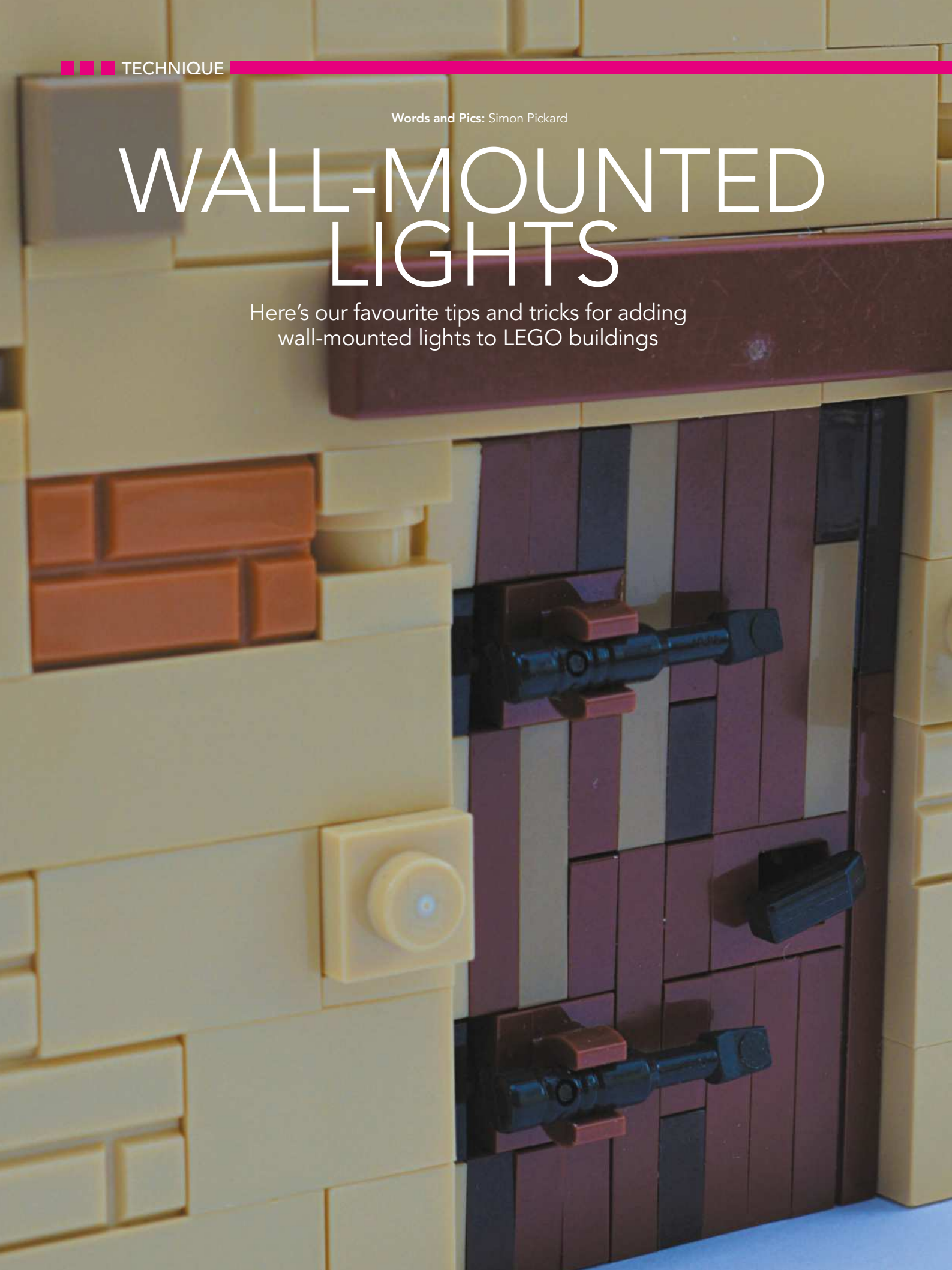




Words and Pics: Simon Pickard

WALL-MOUNTED LIGHTS

Here's our favourite tips and tricks for adding wall-mounted lights to LEGO buildings





FOLLOWING LAST ISSUE'S look at hanging lights, this Technique guide turns to wall-mounted lights supported from the underside. The ideas explored here should provide a range of concepts that can be mixed and matched to achieve different effects. It is a good idea to take a look at the key concepts first, then consider how they might be combined to execute a specific build.

KEY



1X1 BRICK WITH T-BAR



1X1 CONE



1X1 PLATE WITH CLIP



1X1 PLATE WITH HORIZONTAL CLIP



1X1 ROUND BRICK



1X1 ROUND PLATE WITH HANDLE



1X1 ROUND PLATE



1X2 INVERTED SLOPE



BAR WITH STUD



CHEESE SLOPE



ERLING



EXTINGUISHER TOP



NECK BRACKET



PNEUMATIC T-BAR



ROSS



ROUND PLATE WITH SHAFT



SHAPED BARS

The first focus is on bar pieces. The bar and clip system has been developed significantly in recent years, so there are different bar parts that can be used. The extinguisher top fits into the stud holes on both the top and the spout. Because of this diversity it can produce two very different styles, despite both methods using an identical piece.

That leads to the next concept, which uses the pneumatic T-bar piece. There are other bars that can offer different shapes, but the T-bar is able to sit much flusher to the wall than other options. There is also the option of rotating the bar and using it to support two lights, using clip pieces to hold up the lanterns. This would also work for hanging lanterns – the concepts are often similar.

The final bar piece shown has a round stud plate at one end. It can support elements with its stud in multiple directions. It can be used to hold up a light, or can be rotated to the sideways position, allowing for light pieces on each side – ideal for industrial or space-themed lighting.

KEY CONCEPT

Bar elements offer a vast array of connection options. Bars come with clips, studs and sharp angles. Crucially, they also provide very quick direction changes, making them ideal for supports in the lighting ideas explored here. Perhaps most significant though is the increasing availability of parts that have holes in their studs, allowing for bar parts to be attached.

The extinguisher top offers multiple connection points.





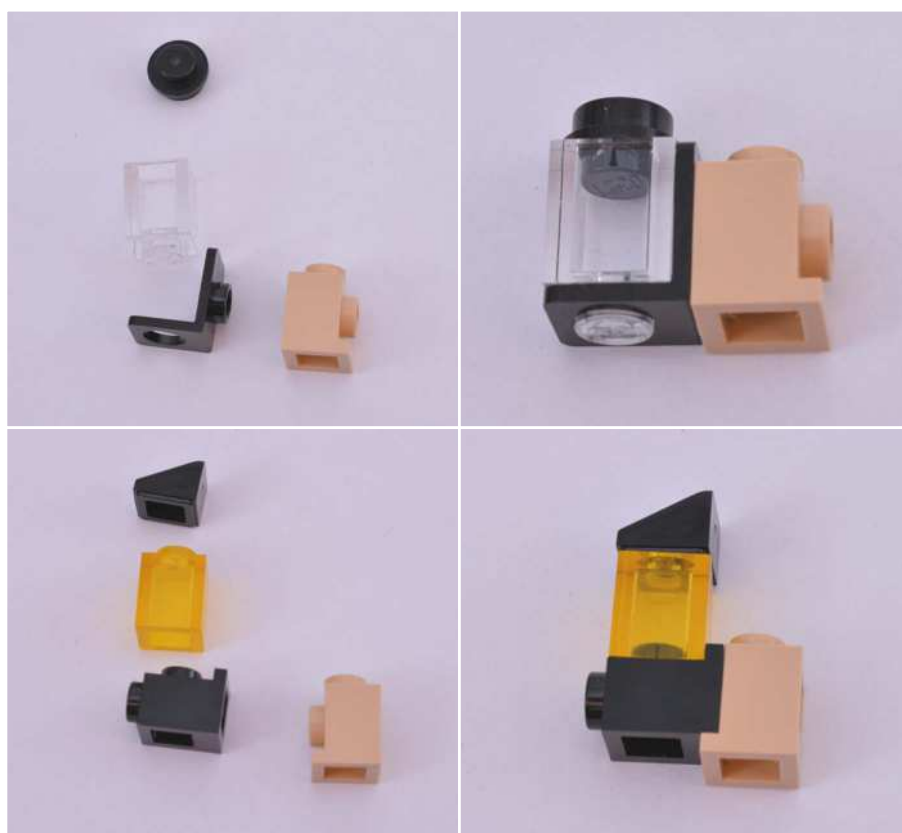
BRACKETING

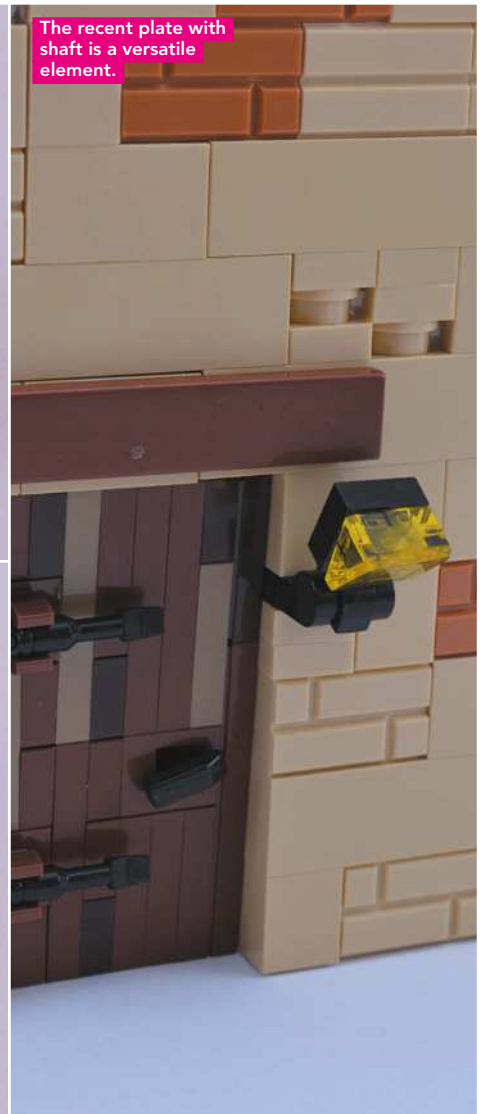
The neck bracket for a lantern holder is a recent innovation used in the modular building sets. They use a round Technic hole tile to act as the receptacle. The back of an erling is a way to allow this to sit much closer to the wall, and thus reduce the size of the supporting features for the light itself.

While there are a great variety of bracket pieces now in circulation, it is also possible to construct one. The second example shows how two erlings fit together to create the support for the lantern. The half plate recess of the erling side stud also ensures that the black part sits in flush against the wall. A ross piece could work instead, with a small gap between the light and the wall.

KEY CONCEPT

Bracket pieces have been available from a very early stage in the LEGO Group's element development. Because of this there are now vast arrays of pieces that offer multiple direction changes. The minifigure neck bracket is perhaps the most overlooked of them all. Unlike most brackets, this piece is extremely streamlined and until recently was the only 1x1 bracket type available.





The recent plate with shaft is a versatile element.



Inverted slopes can offer a bold look.

EMBEDDED

The sheer variety of plates and bricks with bar handles makes it possible to create a range of angled lighting in a more compact manner than the previous examples shown, by embedding them into the wall.

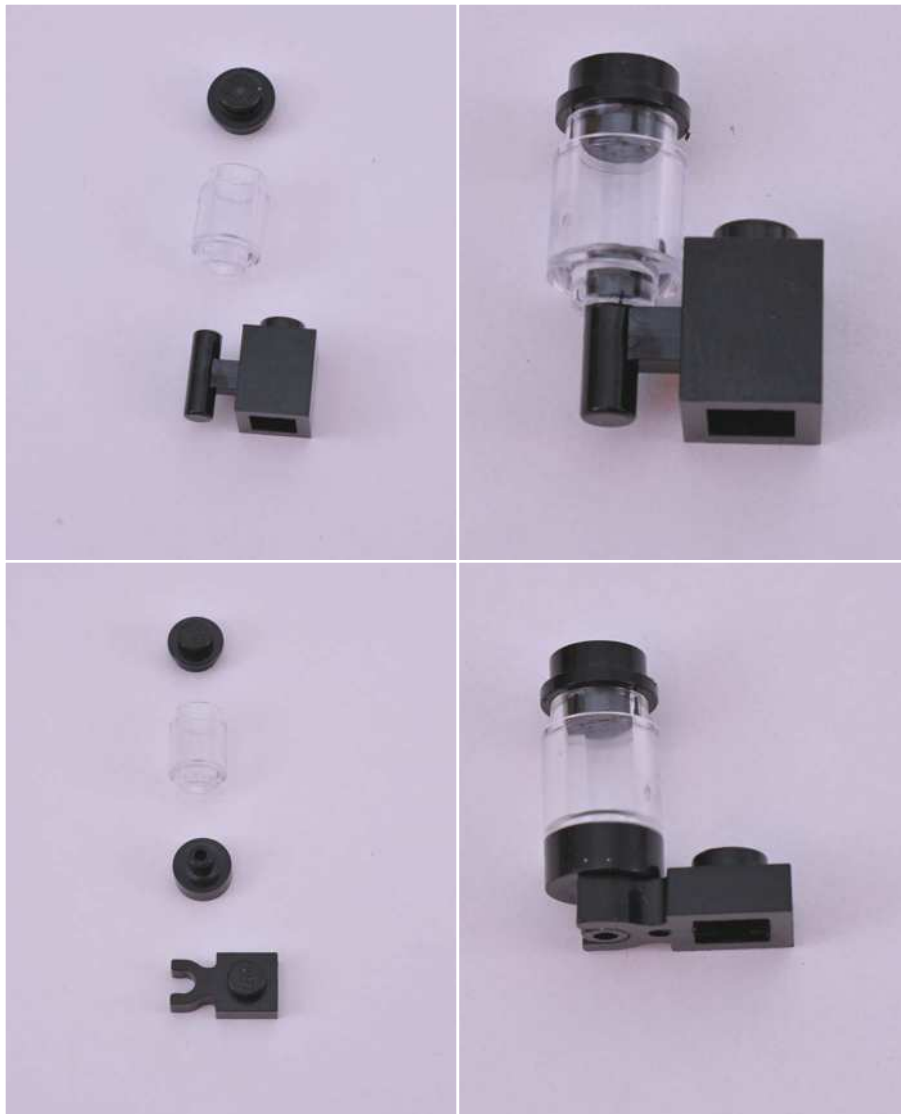
The inverted slope offers the other extreme. Large protrusions like these allow for a bolder and more substantial light, which might be better suited to industrial sites. A fully embedded design like this is also much easier to fit with real lighting effects.

The third example appears very similar to the shaped bar examples. The 1x1 brick with T-bar has a realistic look to it as a lighting wall mount. There are other bricks and plates with protrusions that can help fuel creativity in developing similar support structures.

The final example uses a relatively new piece, a round plate with shaft. In essence, this is a small bar element atop a round tile. Its small size makes it very attractive when a more subtle design for a building is needed. This is one of those ideas that works equally well from a hanging position too, and it is possible to attach a round brick on to it in multiple stud directions, providing more choice in how the top and bottom of a lamp is capped.

KEY CONCEPT

These design approaches often provide a more rigid and stable structure than the bar and bracket options. It is easier to keep them aligned straight with the building. Parts embedded into the wall can take much more weight and are better suited to angled lighting options due to this rigidity. ■



Bricks and plates with protrusions create new possibilities.



Bar handles are everywhere.



Name:

Simon Pickard

Flickr ID:

brick.spartan



BIONICLE MINIFIGURE ARM

A small piece with mighty potential hails from a much-maligned subtheme

Words and Pics: Simon Pickard

THE BIONICLE LINE of LEGO sets was very popular, and even spawned a brief comeback release in 2015. There was a less fondly-remembered line of BIONICLE

figures that has provided an exciting piece for the development of detail and support, in both small and large-scale creations.

The piece in question is the arm part of these specialised minifigures. Bar and clip-related pieces have become very popular, and highly useful in the range of parts available. This piece in many ways was ahead of its time, given its excellent potential for interaction with the bar parts.

The element provides a standard clip and a bar receiving hole at each end. Critically, it also offers a side hole that will grip on to the

bars as well. Combined with its unusual angle, this part is ideal for creating tiny details that are particularly hard to achieve in small scale creations, such as the model featured here.

BAR AND CLIP PIECES HAVE BECOME VERY POPULAR

The 'Night Shadow' build uses several of these BIONICLE arms for its construction. There are two near the feet of the minifigure. They clip on to the upper body section while having a bar pass between them, which then secures the tail section to the build. One of

these parts also slots into the transparent bar used to provide the Night Shadow's elevation for the photograph.

Two more of these arms are buried into the middle of its back, providing further directional changes for the various bar attachments needed for all of the detailing pieces. The last is located right above the head of the minifigure. Here the clip pieces are used in a creative attachment (or an illegal attachment to purists). The clip is actually attached into the bar hole of another arm piece, with the outer part of the clip grasping the top of the same element.

All these smaller attachments provide the essential framework to create the attachments for the wings and appendages that permeate from this minifigure's machine. ■

RETIRED PIECE: MAGNET

Used in multiple themes, the magnet element was popular for a while before it disappeared

Words: Daniel Konstanski **Pics:** Daniel Konstanski, The LEGO Group

IT'S QUITE SURPRISING just how many sets used 73092 Magnet Cylindrical – 141 in total. Despite its prolific spread, however, the variety of uses for the piece was actually fairly limited.

Far and away the most frequent place to find the magnet over its nearly three-decade production run was joining train cars together. The piece was invented for this purpose and put into production with the modern era of trains, which began with the reinvention of the line to fit the minifigure in 1980. For the next 10 years this was the only application you would find this magnet used in, and it would continue to function in this capacity until the bitter end in 2007, as one of the three final

sets to include 73092 was 10183 Hobby Trains.

Then came the expansion in 1990. LEGO designers realised that magnets could add a level of cool to sci-fi sets, and began to include them as a play feature. The first occasion was in M-Tron, which was literally an abbreviation for Magnitron. These salvagers/miners used the magnet to carry cargo. Sci-fi would go on to be the second home of magnet elements for the duration of the decade, as they popped up over and over in both Space and Aquazone as play features.

The piece was also used to achieve a desired build technique not possible with other elements of that era or a wacky dynamic feature. One memorable example is in 10030

Imperial Star Destroyer, the original Ultimate Collector Series release of the ship, which relied on magnets to hold its triangular hull plates in place.

Safety and an expanding parts catalogue led to 73092 Magnet Cylindrical's retirement. Ball and socket elements, along with a host of new brackets, began to allow for a plethora of unique connections that were far more solid than achieving the same effect via magnets. Furthermore, trains began releasing a magnet integrated into the coupling rather than a detachable one, as a safety precaution to avoid ingestion. While this reason makes perfect sense, many fans still get a heavy dose of nostalgia from this piece. ■



The element was originally designed for trains.



M-Tron was the first non-train use of magnets

Number: 73092
Official Name: Magnet Cylindrical
Unofficial Name: Magnet piece
No. Sets Included In: 141
No. Colour Variants: 1
Years Produced: 1980 – 2007
First Appearance: 1980
Final Appearance: 2007
Why We Miss It: Its functionality has not been duplicated in another element

The magnet in the piece was quite strong.



Space sets also used the magnet.



RED DWARF STARBUG

Bob Turner returns to Ideas with one mantra in mind:
if at first you don't succeed, try, try again

Words: Chris Wharfe **Pics:** Bob Turner, MathiasJulin, kirteem

An instantly recognisable cast of characters.

Bob with both of his Red Dwarf Ideas projects.



Starbug is iconic for fans of the cult show.

WHEN BOB TURNER'S original Red Dwarf Ideas project reached 10,000 votes, it seemed like a safe bet for approval by the LEGO Group. After all, cult TV shows are practically the purview of the theme, and as 21304 Doctor Who proved in 2015, British series aren't off-limits. Unfortunately for Bob and the legions of LEGO fans who supported his project, it wasn't meant to be. But now Bob's back for breakfast – and presumably hoping for smoked kippers – with a second attempt at making a LEGO Red Dwarf set a reality.

This isn't your first Red Dwarf project. Why did you decide to give it another go, and what have you done differently this time round?

I had never intended doing another Red Dwarf build, but when I launched my first LEGO idea back in 2016 and attended various brick

shows to promote it, the first thing I always got asked was, 'When are you doing Starbug?' It's been in the back of my mind since then, but I had no idea where to start at the time. After my first idea hit 10,000 votes, I'd gained a following of not just LEGO fans, but Red Dwarf fans too. I had a great foundation in place if I were to ever launch another Red Dwarf project.

I decided on the Starbug spacecraft itself because it is far more iconic and recognisable. For my new project, the team at Minifigs.me have completely revamped the minifigures: Cat and Lister are both in their season four outfits, Kryten is in his season seven look, and this time we've included the female incarnation of the ship's senile computer system, Holly.

We've also added navigational officer and Lister's love interest Christine Kochanski to the minifigure line-up, as it's something I got asked the most whilst promoting my first idea, and Rimmer in his Gingham dress attire – including

his Mr. Flibble hand puppet from the season five episode Quarantine (a big favourite amongst Red Dwarf fans).

What lessons did you take from your first Red Dwarf project?

Not to be afraid of reaching out to other countries for support. For instance, whilst promoting my first idea I discovered Red Dwarf has a large following in the Czech Republic. Brick shows are also a great avenue for gathering support – I have business cards made up showcasing all my Red Dwarf builds on the front, and a quick and easy guide to supporting my Starbug idea on the back. The Blue Midget Spacecraft from my original Red Dwarf project always gets a lot of attention at shows; if there's one thing fans seem to love, it's mechs and spaceships.

Can you talk us through Starbug's design?

I started out by finding every photo of Starbug online that I could, taken from every angle

possible. These were pinned up as a constant reference, as well as taking screenshots from the show for all the internal parts of the ship. Then began endless amounts of trial and error building. One of the hardest parts was flipping the floor on the bottom section of the central sphere, to then build the interior section on top of it. 'Chopping' a quarter from the back sphere to make way for the engines, and hinging the central door so that it closed perfectly in line with the rest of the dome also proved difficult, and took many attempts and rebuilds.

Once I'd decided on the dark green colour, I began sourcing the parts on BrickLink, adding to the ones I already had in my inventory. I even got in touch with Terry Fisher, who built the LEGO Ideas Land Rover. I'd made friends with him whilst promoting my first project. I knew he had a good selection of dark green parts, and he kindly gave me some of the ones he had left over from his builds.

If the project is approved, are there any compromises or changes you think the LEGO designers might have to make?

I was limited as to what pieces I could use in the build, simply because dark green isn't the most widely available LEGO colour, and found myself 'doubling up' quite a lot – either because the part didn't exist, or because it was

very hard to come by. For example, instead of a 1x8 plate I had to use two 1x4 plates, or 1x2 brackets had to be two 1x1 brackets, so the piece count could be reduced dramatically should it be approved.

What channels have you used to promote your project this time? Which of these do you think has been most successful?

I have my 'Bob's Vintage Bricks' pages set up on most of the popular social media outlets – Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Flickr, TikTok, LinkedIn – and also have a website, www.bobsvintagebricks.com, but Twitter has definitely gained the most engagement, with my 'pinned' tweet receiving over 1,450 retweets so far! That's not to mention Danny John-Jules, who plays Cat in the show, posting his support along with retweets from The Official Red Dwarf Fan Club.

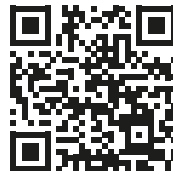
What kind of feedback have you had so far? Are you planning any updates/modifications based on that feedback?

The initial feedback has been brilliant, from both Red Dwarf and LEGO fans and I am very pleased with the support. The main request I've had so far is to have a standard uniform version of Rimmer included in the set, which Ben from Minifigs.me is currently working on. ■



INFO

Ideas ID:
Bobs Vintage Bricks
Project:
<https://tinyurl.com/tse52q6>



ELSEWHERE ON LEGO IDEAS

There are dozens of projects on LEGO Ideas – here are just a couple worth checking out



Ideas ID:
MathiasJulin
Project:
<https://tinyurl.com/r7392ty>

■ Nyhavn - Copenhagen, Denmark

To say Denmark is the home of the brick, very few wide-release LEGO sets have represented the Scandinavian country. MathiasJulin is hoping to remedy that with his impressive microscale build, which recreates the colourful townhouses of Nyhavn in Copenhagen. The waterfront promenade translates to 'New Harbour', referring to the redevelopment that occurred there in the 1980s.



Ideas ID:
kirteem
Project:
<https://tinyurl.com/vcofmsa>

■ Ruined House

From the image above, you could easily be fooled into thinking this isn't LEGO. That's because kirteem's intricately-crafted crumbling building is a masterpiece of abandoned architecture, constructed by an artist who's clearly relishing using LEGO bricks as the paint on their canvas.

Fancy getting your LEGO Ideas project featured in Blocks? Send it to editor@blocksmag.com with the subject title 'Blocks Ideas [your project name]'.

Builder:
Rob Cooke

MOC IN PICS / La Giralda

The Seville landmark is recreated with over 8,000 LEGO bricks

Words and Pics: Rob Cooke

LA GIRALDA IS an absolutely beautiful building. Originally built in 1195 as part of a mosque by the Moors who occupied the Iberian peninsula, it stands proudly in the centre of Seville, boasting a wealth of culture and history. After living in Seville and subsequently moving back to the UK, I missed seeing it day-to-day, so I decided to build it in LEGO as a piece for my living room. It was only supposed to be about 30cm tall at first – oops. Either way, now I don't feel too far from Spain.



A minifigure statue tops the model.

The build is 1.15m tall.

LEGO La Giralda uses more than 8,000 bricks.

Curved arch, part 88292, works perfectly for capturing the archways authentically.

Regular bricks are interspersed with masonry bricks.



The orange trees at the base of the tower are what Seville is famous for, and they line the streets of the city.



BLOCKS MOCS /

The latest selection of MOCs that have caught the attention of the Blocks team



AFRICAN VIOLETS
Builder:
 Jessica Farrell
Flickr ID:
 Jessica Farrell

ANT-MAN
Builder:
 flambo14
Flickr ID:
 flambo14



BATTLE DROID
Builder:
 Jose Maria
Flickr ID:
 hachiroku24

PIRATE HUNTER
Builder:
 Jonas Kramm
Flickr ID:
 Jonas Kramm



THE SIMPSONS
Builder:
 Julius Von Brunk
YouTube ID:
 Baron Julius von Brunk

MOC&A / THE BEAST

Builder:
Alessandro Messori
Flickr ID:
Alessandro
Messora

This imposing character looms over other construction figures

Words: Graham Hancock
Pics: Alessandro Messori

A**FTER COMING UP** with a design for the figure's leg, Alessandro Messori built up the Beast. The build wound up looking a little like the character from *Over the Garden Wall*, so Alessandro gave it the same name. We asked the LEGO collector and builder about how the creepy-looking character came about.

Blocks: What are your favourite LEGO CCBS (Character and Creature Building System) sets? Do you have a big collection?

Alessandro: It's a very difficult question to answer, especially because I haven't gotten that many CCBS sets outside of BIONICLE G2, since I'm primarily a BIONICLE set collector. So, when it comes to BIONICLE, I would probably say 71310 Umarak the Hunter, for its creative set and character design that's clearly inspired by folklore from all over the world. Another really cool set was 75112 General Grievous from the Star Wars Buildable Figures (one of the few non-BIONICLE CCBS sets I have), though that's probably due more to the original source material than anything else.

The Beast is an imposing figure.



Alessandro used pieces from his sets.



The model is packed with character.



What inspired this build?

I was inspired to build a CCBS MOC after discovering the 'Bionicle Inspiration Series' by Ben Cossy on YouTube. I came up with the leg design while taking the train to university for an exam. It ended up working quite well, so I thought I might as well continue from there, and that's pretty much it. I didn't start building with a clear picture in mind of the final product, and simply went where the parts I had took me.

How quickly did it come together?

The build took about 12 hours from start to finish, spread over three days. The whole build started from the legs, and then I worked my way from the hips to the shoulders, then I did the head, and then the arms. I had absolutely zero plans when I started building, so the process was mostly dictated by the parts I had and the creative flow of the moment.

What challenges were there when putting it together?

The biggest challenge was definitely the fact that, being mostly a BIONICLE collector, I don't have a 'MOCing parts bin', so I had to pick the pieces from my displayed sets as I needed them. As a matter of fact, almost all the pieces used in this MOC come from less than a dozen sets (most of them being BIONICLE G2 sets, a couple of Star Wars sets and Hero Factory 7145 Von Nebula). Another challenge was that I hadn't touched a CCBS MOC in well over three years. If I ever MOC, it's generally with Technic/Mindstorms now, so getting back on track at first was a bit slow, but not that hard – after all, Technic and CCBS go hand in hand.

What are you happiest with about the finished design?

I was quite happy about its general stance – and the fact that it can stand at all given the small hoof-like feet it has was surprising; it's more stable than I thought it was at first. It's not terribly tall, but it's definitely tall enough to look imposing and grab attention. I also think the head came out quite nicely – when I look at it I don't immediately say, 'Oh, that's K-2SO's face,' so that's definitely a good thing. The thing I was most happy with, however, was how clean and streamlined it ended up looking.

Do you have any plans for your next MOC?

I'm not much of a MOCer and I tend to build only when I get a 'eureka!' moment of sorts, which I have noticed generally comes after an intense period of studying for school (and now for university). So maybe when the next big exam time comes I'll be inspired to build something new, but for now I have no real plans, especially since it's been quite a bit of time since I've taken my beloved camera out and about in nature, which is generally my favourite thing to do. ■

MOC&A / LEGO CACTUS GARDEN

Jordan Johnson's cacti are low maintenance – they are built from LEGO bricks

Words: Graham Hancock

Pics: Jordan Johnson

ESCHEWING MINIFIGURE SCALE, Jordan Johnson has built a series of life-sized succulents. After building a fun cactus tree house, he has gone on to build more of the resilient plants. The talented builder spoke to Blocks about how he came to build these models.

Blocks: What was your first plant build?

Jordan Johnson: I have tinkered around with various minifigure plants and trees, but my first 'true' plant was a bonsai tree. I had tinkered with a smaller version of the same idea and decided to make a proper tree, but wanted it to be life-sized.

What gave you the inspiration to build cacti?

Cacti are my favourite plants. I grew up with lots of Western art exposure and a few species grew on my parents' land. This particular build had two major influences. The first was my housemate, who actually had a number of succulents and cacti in the house – they are the ones featured in the picture – while the second was seeing succulents in my office.

But I only sought out building cacti because of the Ideas Tree House. For the Brick Universe convention at the time, right before the announcement of the official Tree House set, I wanted to pitch a group build of tree houses, as the set would fit right in with them. I made five, all in different themes. The biggest crowd-pleaser by far was the saguaro cactus tree house. Nothing else I brought to the show got near the attention of that build. It even won Paul Hetherington's Choice at that particular event. After that convention, I knew I had a few cacti to make.

What challenges did the organic shapes present?

Curves are always a struggle for me, which is probably why most of my creations turn out more angular. For the plant shapes, though, I actually had a small supply of sand green

before attempting this project – my local LEGO store happened to have 1x2 plates, 1x4 plates and the 1x1 clips. The volume of small bricks helped with the round shape, and the clips totally sell the spiny look of cacti.

What is your favourite thing about the

finished models?

They feel real. The shape and colour lend themselves to the real plants. They are one of my few creations that I can look at and get a Bob Ross 'happy little trees' bit of joy. I also totally understand why people take care of succulents immensely more now.



The LEGO plants sit alongside the real ones.



RE-WIND



ADVENTURERS: DESERT

If it's adventure you're seeking, turn back the clock to 1998 for the introduction of a historic LEGO theme

Words: Chris Wharfe **Pics:** Daniel Konstanski, The LEGO Group

A YEAR BEFORE the LEGO Group released its first ever range of licensed sets from a galaxy far, far away, it riffed on another Lucasfilm property with Adventurers. The narrative-driven theme was fronted by a zany cast of characters, headed up by the now-iconic Johnny Thunder – who shared more than a few traits with Harrison Ford's whip-cracking Indiana Jones.

Adventurers departed from the LEGO Group's wider portfolio by grounding its sets in real-world locations, with the launch wave taking the action to the deserts of Egypt. So the story went, the hardy gang of explorers were searching for the legendary Re-Gou Ruby, a supposedly magical red jewel element guarded by the undead Pharaoh Hotep.

The resulting batch of sets combined all the hallmarks of '90s LEGO models with all the stereotypes of a tale woven through Egyptian tombs. Mummies, skeletons, and sphinxes galore permeated

Adventurers' first outing, with plenty of playability baked into each set – often by way of inventive booby traps. But the theme's strongest quality really was its narrative, with a cast of identifiable characters that appeared year after year across the various subthemes (even while their names inexplicably changed).

To that end, Adventurers almost feels like a precursor to the LEGO Group's most successful big bang themes, including NINJAGO. More prophetically, it also marked one of the company's earliest attempts at multimedia tie-ins, as a radio play titled *Adventurers: The Hunt for the Pharaoh's Treasure* debuted alongside the theme in 1998. The success of that first wave would see Johnny Thunder and co. travel to three more locations over the following five years, including the LEGO Group's own take on *Jurassic Park* – but we're getting ahead of ourselves...

The theme traded heavily on iconic Egyptian imagery.





MEMORY LANE

'THEY PERFECTLY CAPTURED THE INDIANA JONES SPIRIT OF ADVENTURE'

GRAHAM LAMENTS NOT PICKING UP MORE ADVENTURERS SETS

I didn't own a great many LEGO Adventurers sets when they were released, but I thoroughly enjoyed the box art. They perfectly captured the Indiana Jones spirit of adventure that had been aped in so many 1980s movies that I had seen on television, with those wonderful Egyptian settings and old-world vehicles. 5988 The Temple of Anubis was the one that really made the whole concept coalesce in a single box, with the foreboding temple coming with the car and hot air balloon, as well as all the key characters.

What I felt I was most missing out on by not picking up many of the sets were the fun elements included in the range – treasure chests in black, tombs in various colours, the pharaoh headpiece; even Johnny Thunder's hat. Writing about this is sending me straight to BrickLink to check the prices of these sets...

BREAKING DOWN THE THEME



- Four small sets from the original wave were re-released with new product numbers in 1999.
- Eight named characters featured in the Desert subtheme, including two Pharaohs.
- LEGOLAND Windsor's Laser Raiders attraction is based on Adventurers' Desert subtheme.



MEMORY LANE

'I WAS A LITTLE GUTTED WHEN I REALISED WHAT I'D MISSED OUT ON'

CHRIS REMEMBERS FIRST DISCOVERING THE DESERT SUBTHEME

Adventurers originally caught my eye with the Dino subtheme, and while there was plenty to love about those sets, I was a little gutted when – years later – I first stumbled upon knowledge of what I'd missed out on. But then I realised I actually was aware of Johnny Thunder's earliest outings as a kid. I just didn't know it at the time.

One of the LEGO Group's first forays into videogame territory was LEGO Racers, and I spent a serious chunk of my childhood mastering the company's brick-based take on Mario Kart. First released in 1999, the game featured four different LEGO themes, with Adventurers among them. Johnny Thunder, Baron von Barron, Sam Sinister and Gail Storm all made appearances, and multiple circuits were themed around the Desert and Jungle waves. Finding out it was all based on real sets was basically my first LEGO epiphany.

BY THE NUMBERS

Years active: 1998 - 1999

25

THE NUMBER OF DESERT SETS WITH UNIQUE PRODUCT NUMBERS

3

TOTAL AMOUNT OF DIFFERENT PRODUCT NUMBERS GIVEN TO DESERT EXPEDITION

4

THE NUMBER OF BIPLANES ACROSS THE SUBTHEME

13

PIECES IN 1094/5900 JOHNNY THUNDER, THE SMALLEST SET

711

PIECES IN 5988 THE TEMPLE OF ANUBIS, THE LARGEST SET

Aftermarket price: £384 new, £137 used / Minifigures: 10 / Pieces: 711

5988 THE TEMPLE OF ANUBIS

THE LEGO GROUP didn't bother trying to incorporate a pyramid into the flagship Desert set, in the same way it did for Pharaoh's Quest in 2013. But the alternative on offer in 5988 The Temple of Anubis – or 5988 Forbidden Ruins, as it was known in some markets – will have been enough to make most kids completely forget about the curious absence of Egypt's most iconic architecture.

The soaring structure is a real feast for the eyes, decorated with an abundance of hieroglyphics (although it's a shame the art doesn't more closely resemble minifigures). More importantly, though, it's a gateway to virtually unlimited play. The main build is split across two flat 16x32 baseplates, with 5978 Sphinx Secret Surprise the only

Desert Adventurers set to include a one-off, 3D baseplate. The first plate contains the towering temple, which houses a sarcophagus, a ladder to an upper level, a treasure chest and two trapdoors.

The temple is completed with the second baseplate, which builds a much shorter – but no less impressive – section. There's a nod to the eponymous Egyptian god of the dead with two brick-built Anubis statues, which guard the elusive Re-Gou Ruby that the heroes and villains are racing to find. When they do, they'll have a hidden mechanic to contend with: a rotating door with a magnet on one side, which can be used to whip the jewel's container away from meddling explorers.

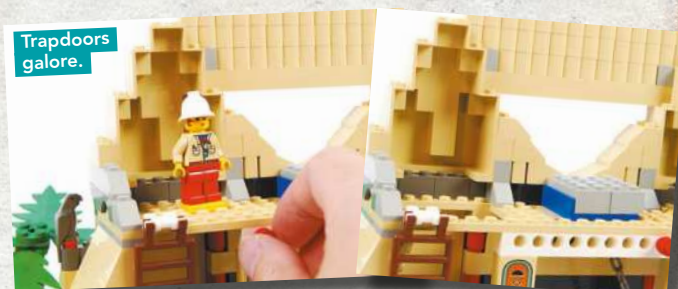
The play potential doesn't end with the

temple, though, as the package is rounded out by a truck and hot air balloon, each adding the possibility for vehicular carnage to the proceedings. Fence pieces are employed to great use in the pickup truck, in just one example of how perfectly '90s the Desert subtheme was. The palm trees, bushes and big ugly rock pieces used elsewhere are all trademarks of the era, and they're all present and correct in 5988.

A whopping 10 minifigures were included in the box, meaning you really only needed this set to get the most out of Adventurers' first subtheme. And maybe that's why, even with its admittedly dated aesthetics, it's still so sought after by collectors, and commands an accordingly high price on the aftermarket – pyramid or no pyramid.



Magnetic.



Trapdoors galore.



A temple for the ages.

Aftermarket price: £186 new, £69 used / **Minifigures:** 7 / **Pieces:** 347

5978 SPHINX SECRET SURPRISE

SPOILER ALERT: THE sphinx's secret surprise is... a mummy. Okay, so this set isn't going to win any awards for plot twists, but it doesn't need to. Instead, it can join the rest of the theme in taking home the gong for Most Playability. (For the sake of this analogy, we're pretending there's a LEGO Academy Awards ceremony. Just roll with it.)

The colourful, brick-built sphinx, which adopts a much more classical form than its snarling cousin in Pharaoh's Quest's 7326 Rise of the Sphinx, sits atop the theme's only unique baseplate. It's a great slice of terrain, incorporating steps, pits and slopes, and lends itself well to an action-packed build. A collapsible obelisk, hidden compartments, and a lever to spring forth Pharaoh Hotep all add to the play experience.

Even if it's not LEGO Oscar-worthy, the narrative comes through strongly, fleshed out by the addition of a tent and campfire. Dr. Charles Lightning (as he was originally called) and his suite of maps are a good reminder that just like Indiana Jones, the heroes' motive is first and foremost archaeological – even if the good doctor is also apparently packing a pistol and some dynamite.

5978 also includes a larger, more detailed version of 5918 Scorpion Tracker, Johnny Thunder's mode of transport. Just like the standalone set, the car incorporates the moulded cockpit element introduced for this theme, which allows two minifigures to sit side by side. There's no way a juniorised piece like that would pass today, but we've rectified that particular problem overleaf...

The gang goes camping.



Just look at that lovely moulded baseplate.



RE-BUILD

UPGRADING THE SCORPION TRACKER



A tiny favourite from the inaugural Adventurers line gets a modern upgrade

Words and Pics: Daniel Konstanski

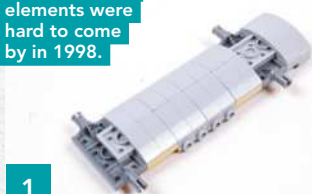
THE 35-PIECE 5918 Scorpion Tracker from the original Adventurers line is proof positive that good things come in small packages. A fabulous little set that gave a tantalising taste of all the theme had to offer, it was a delight

all by itself, and even better as part of a larger collection. Alas, it is also a product of its time, and definitely looks a bit dated next to today's six- or eight-stud wide vehicles. It was therefore a prime target for going up on the

workbench, to see what could be done with all the new elements that have come out in the intervening 22 years.

THE BUILD

Sloping curved elements were hard to come by in 1998.



1



2



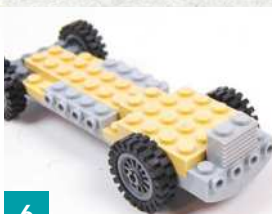
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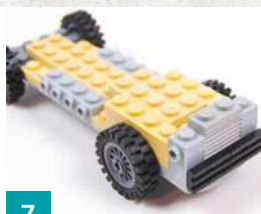
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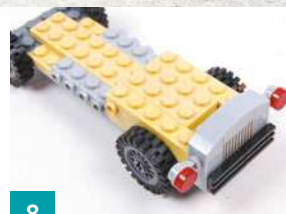
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6



7



8



9



10



11



12

A sub-assembly for the sides.



13



14



15



16



17



18



19



20



21



22



23



24

Single-use
elements
are out.



25



26



■ ■ THE SCORPION TRACKER
IS PROOF POSITIVE THAT
GOOD THINGS COME IN
SMALL PACKAGES ■ ■

Maintaining the wide
body was key.





LEGO EVENTS

Do you run an event that should be listed here? Get in touch with us via graham@blocksmag.com and we'll add it to the list

APRIL 2020

Rochdale Brick Show (UK)

When: April 4

Where: The Wheatsheaf Shopping Centre, Baillie St, Rochdale, OL16 1JZ

What's on: Displays of LEGO models, LEGO activities and traders from Northern Brickworks.

Visit: facebook.com/northernbrickworks

The Brighton Bricks Show (UK)

When: April 11

Where: Brighton Unitarian Church, New Road, Brighton, BN1 1UF

What's on: The Brighton Bricks LEGO User Group will bring impressive brick built displays to this fun show, which will also feature traders and activities.

Visit: brightonbricks.com/brighton-bricks-events

Brickworld Milwaukee (USA)

When: April 18 – 19

Where: Wisconsin State Fair, West Allis, Wisconsin 53214

What's on: Kenosha LUG and Wisconsin LUG will fill a 32,000 square foot venue with LEGO displays and activities.

Visit: www.brickworld.com/brickworld-milwaukee

St Philip's Brick Show (UK)

When: April 25

Where: St. Philip's Church, Cosham, Portsmouth, PO6 2TL

What's on: LEGO displays and family-friendly activities.

Visit: brickish.org/event/st-philips-brick-show-2020/

BrickFest Live (USA)

When: April 25 – 26

Where: The Greater Philadelphia Expo Center, Oaks, PA 19456

What's on: Activities include a speedway, gaming area, mosaic building, mini golf and plenty of building opportunities. There will also be photo ops and model displays.

Visit: www.brickfestlive.com

MAY 2020

Discovery Brick Show (UK)

When: May 2 – 3

Where: Discovery Museum, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 4JA

What's on: Held by the Brick Alley LEGO User Group, the event takes place at the Discovery Museum. It offers displays of LEGO models, sellers and activities as well as the opportunity to enjoy the museum.

Visit: www.brickalley.co.uk/discovery

Brickslopes (USA)

When: May 15

Where: Mountain America Expo Center, Sandy, Utah 84070

What's on: LEGO builds to admire, a brick pit to play in, customised cars to race, panel discussions and more.

Visit: www.brickslopes.com

Yorkshire Brick Show (UK)

When: May 16 – 17

Where: East Riding College, Yorkshire, YO16 7JW

What's on: Fan created LEGO models on display, activities for attendees and shopping opportunities.

Visit: facebook.com/BrickshireLUG

Edinbrick (UK)

When: May 16

Where: Potterrow Dome, Edinburgh, EH8 9AL

What's on: With double the floor space compared to last year, the show will offer bigger displays, a build zone, trains to control and a tombola.

Visit: www.ticketsource.co.uk/edinbrick

JUNE 2020

Brick Express (UK)

When: June 7

Where: Avon Valley Railway, Bitton Station, Bristol, BS30 6HD

What's on: GertLUG is putting on LEGO displays that will cover town trains and fantasy. There will be hands-on LEGO workshops on an actual train as well as the opportunity to try driving a miniature train.

Visit: www.avonvalleyrailway.org/events/brick-express/

Huddersfield Brick Show (UK)

When: June 7

Where: St Philip's Parish Hall, Huddersfield, HD3 3NP

What's on: LEGO brick displays and traders.

Visit: www.facebook.com/huddbrickshow

Brickworld Chicago (USA)

When: June 20 – 21

Where: Renaissance Schaumburg Hotel, Schaumburg, Illinois 60173

What's on: Brickworld Chicago covers 100,000 square feet and features creations from 400 artists and engineers from all over the world. There will be activities, shopping opportunities and talks.

Visit: www.brickworld.com/brickworld-chicago

JULY 2020

Bricks-N-Blocks Dalton (USA)

When: July 11 – 12

Where: Dalton Convention Center, Dalton, GA 30720

What's on: Builds on display including the Jurassic Park rollercoaster. Other features include a STEM area, games, fun activities and master builder challenges.

Visit: www.bricksnblocks.com

OCTOBER 2020

Great Western Brick Show (UK)

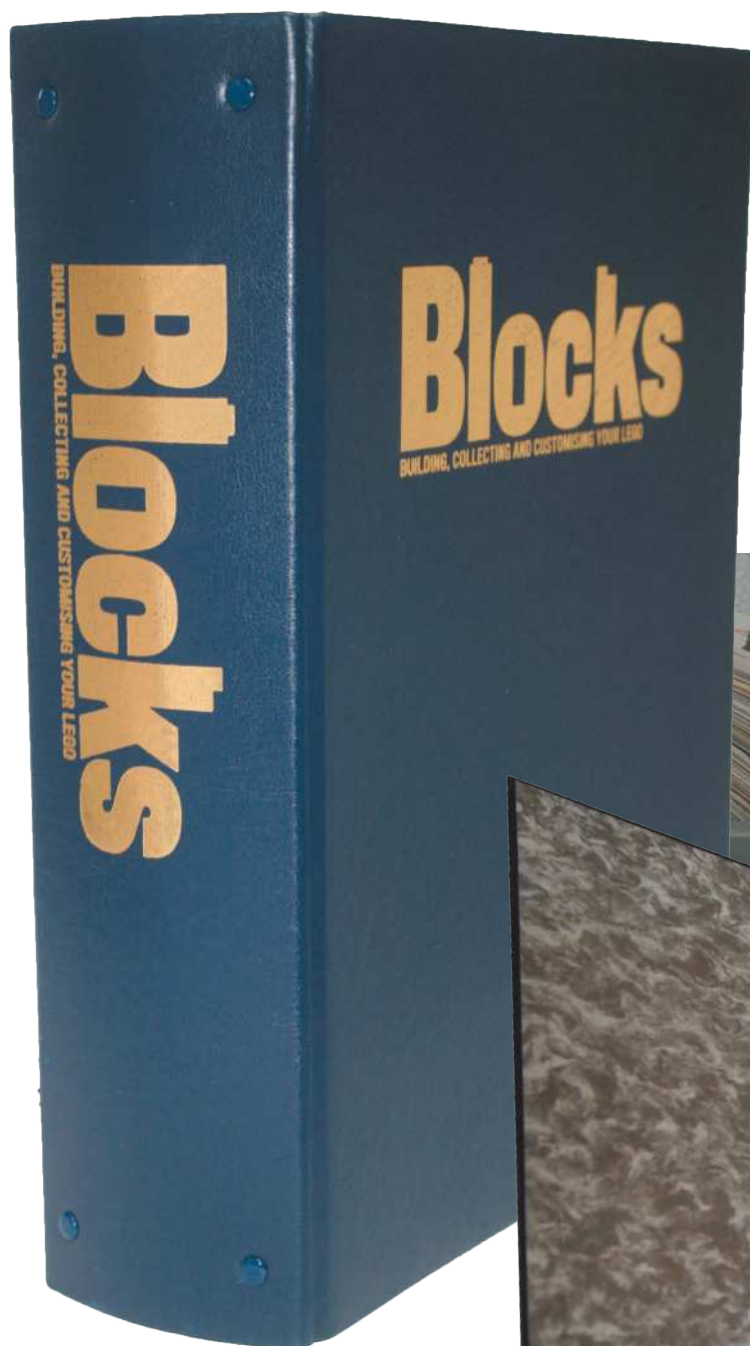
When: October 3 – 4

Where: STEAM, The Museum of GWR, Swindon, SN2 2TA

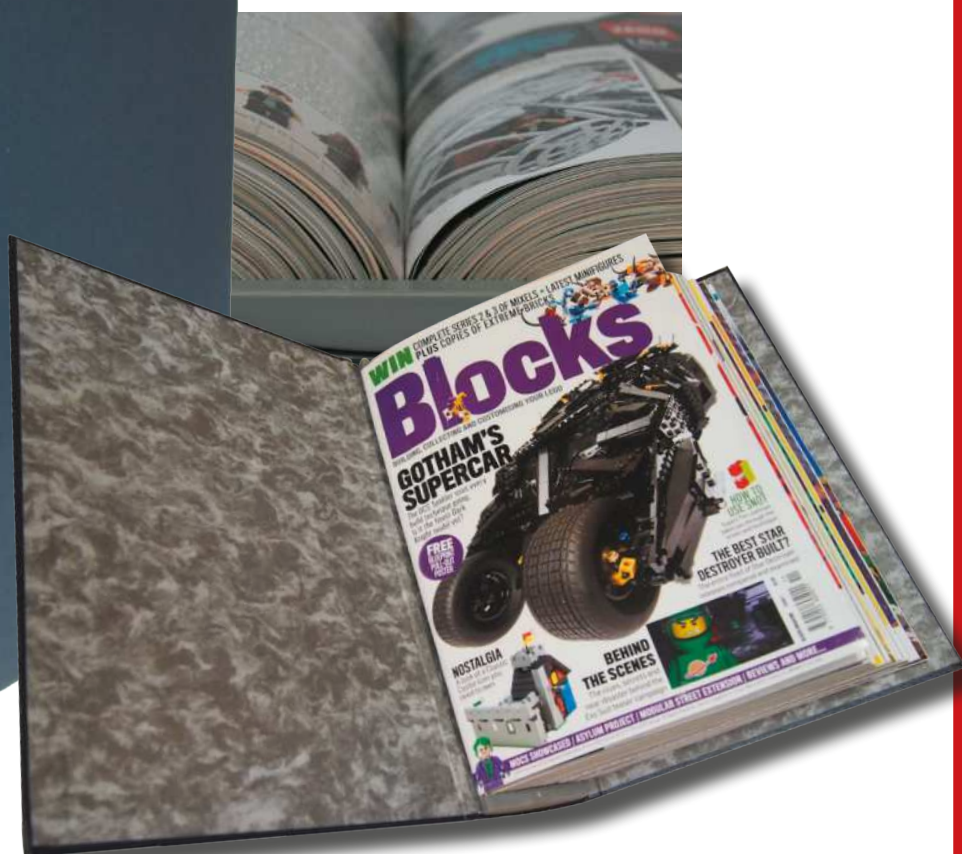
What's on: At the Brickish Association's long-running show, the LUG presents one of the largest displays of LEGO models in the UK. As well as admire the builds, guests can help create an all-new giant LEGO mosaic, visit the LEGO Shop and other independent traders as well as get building in the brick pits.

Visit: www.greatwesternbrickshow.com

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Blocks

BRICKIONARY

The language of LEGO has a wide, varied and ever-growing vocabulary. Blocks magazine helps you decode it

A

ABS: Acrylonitrile butadiene styrene. The plastic most LEGO parts are made from.

AFOL: Adult Fan of LEGO.

B

Billund: Town in Denmark where the headquarters and primary design centre of the LEGO Group is situated.

Bley: Bluish grey. Refers to the current LEGO grey, compared to the old version (known as... old grey).

BOLOCS: Build containing many different colours, often uncoordinated.

Brick-built: A build composed of basic LEGO elements rather than specialised elements, i.e. brick-built figures.

Brickset: An online database of LEGO sets.

BURP: Big Ugly Rock Piece. Moulded piece five bricks high with jagged edges.

C

CC: Classic Castle, a LEGO castle fan site.

Cheese Slope: A sloping LEGO part, named after the fact yellow pieces look like a wedge of cheese.

Clone Brands: Construction toys similar and often compatible with LEGO, but cheaper and lower quality. Usually despised by LEGO fans.

Custom: A LEGO creation or individual element that uses non-LEGO parts, modified parts or accessories from third party vendors like BrickArms or BrickForge.

Customiser: A LEGO fan who's not afraid to modify LEGO parts. Customising may include painting, cutting, drilling, melting or adding non-LEGO parts to a creation. Considered heresy to the purist LEGO fan.

D

D2C: Direct to Consumer sets.

Generally exclusive to LEGO stores, with high piece counts.

Dark Ages: The period in a LEGO fan's

life when they set aside LEGO in favour of other, non-LEGO pursuits.

Diorama: Usually a large build/scene with a base.

Draft: An activity common at LEGO club meetings in which fans each bring a LEGO set, sort out all the elements and then take turns in picking out the type of part they want. An easy way to obtain parts in large quantities without buying multiple parts of the set yourself.

E

Erling: A 1x1 brick with one stud on its recessed side, named after its designer.

G

Greeble: Pseudo-technical detail added to a LEGO creation to enhance its appearance, often seen in LEGO Space and Mecha creations.

GWP: Gift with purchase. A promotional item or set obtained by spending a minimum amount at LEGO Stores or LEGO.com.

H

Half-Stud Offset: A building technique that allows building without regards to standard alignment of studs on a plate, usually achieved with a jumper plate.

I

Illegal: LEGO building techniques that break the 'rules' for connections between LEGO elements used by official LEGO set designers, particularly connections that stress the LEGO elements.

Inventory: The list of LEGO elements included in an official LEGO set. Several LEGO fan sites host set inventories including Peeron, Brickset and BrickLink.

J

Jumper Plate: A 1x2 or 2x2 LEGO plate with only one stud in the centre. Useful for half-stud offset building.

K

KFOL: Kid Fan of LEGO. The LEGO Group's primary target demographic of between 5-12 years.

L

LDD: LEGO Digital Designer. Free software for PC and Mac that lets you build LEGO models virtually.

Legal: LEGO building techniques that follow guidelines for official LEGO set designers.

LEGOs: Incorrect plural of LEGO.

LUG: LEGO User Group. Local or regional LEGO clubs that meet and interact primarily in an offline 'real-world' context. This is changing as the number of online LUGs grows.

M

MF: Minifigure.

Microfig: Small figures, like those in the LEGO Games series.

Midi Scale: Refers to sets that are between miniature and minifigure scale. They do not include minifigures but are more detailed than mini sets. So far only Star Wars sets have midi versions.

Minifigure Scale: A LEGO creation built for the scale of standard LEGO minifigures.

MOC: My Own Creation. A model designed and built by a LEGO fan without instructions. Often used as a verb, 'MOCing'.

Mod: A modification of an official LEGO set, usually changing part colours or adding to original designs.

P

PAB: Pick-A-Brick. Buying individual bricks in the quantities needed from the LEGO Group's online or physical stores.

PAB Wall: The Pick-A-Brick wall found at official LEGO stores.

POOP: Parts Out Of Other Parts. Huge, ugly pieces that could (and should) have been made from existing smaller



parts rather than moulded in one massive lump of plastic.

Purist: A LEGO fan who only uses official LEGO elements. Can be applied to LEGO creations that only contain official LEGO elements with no modifications or custom parts.

S

S@H or SAH: The LEGO Group's online store, shop.LEGO.com. Used to be called Shop At Home.

SHIP: Seriously Heavy Investment in Parts. A MOC, usually a spaceship, over 100 studs long.

Sigfig: The minifigure version of a LEGO fan that is used in online communities as an avatar or signature minifigure.

SNIR: Studs Not In a Row. A building technique using bricks positioned diagonally.

SNOT: Studs Not On Top. A building technique that places elements on their sides or even upside down to achieve a smooth surface.

SPUA: Special Part Used Again. A brick produced for a specific theme, but used for another.

STAMP. Stickers Across Multiple Pieces.

T

TBB: The Brothers Brick, an online LEGO fan site.

TFOL: Teen Fan of LEGO.

TLG: The LEGO Group, the privately held parent company for all LEGO-related brands and companies worldwide.

TRU: Toys R Us.

U

UCS: Ultimate Collector's Series. A line of large LEGO Star Wars sets designed for older teens and adults.

V

Vignette: A small scene recreated on a square plate, generally 8x8 studs.

W

WIP: Work in progress, usually referring to a MOC.

BASIC BRICKS

Baseplates: The foundation for many projects, be it houses, space bases or castles. They're normally thin plates with no connections underneath so you can only build on top. Some older sets included raised baseplates resembling

rocks, hills and other landscaping.

Bricks: At the core of LEGO is the basic brick. They come in a wide range of sizes, usually denoted by their stud pattern – i.e. 2x2, 2x6 – and in a huge colour palette.

Measurements: LEGO fans usually refer to parts by the number of studs they have. For example, a brick that has two studs on the short side and four studs on the longer side would be called a 2x4 brick.

Plates: Thinner than bricks but not as thin as baseplates. Three plates stacked together equals the height of one standard brick. Can be joined from above or below like standard bricks.

Printed Parts: Can be bricks, plates or tiles. They come with printed designs, often referred to as decorated parts.

Studs: The fundamental joining method of basic LEGO bricks.

Tiles: Thin, like plates but without any studs on top (see SNOT).

■ If you can think of a widely-used LEGO term that's not in the Brictionary, drop us a line at editor@blocksmag.com to get it included.



10213 Shuttle Adventure is now worth nearly 600 times its original RRP.



The current crop of NASA sets could be worthwhile investments.

SPECULATING ON SPACE SETS

The BrickPicker team aims for the stars with brick profits that are truly out of this world

Words: Ed Mack, BrickPicker Pics: The LEGO Group

SPACE MAY BE the final frontier, but in LEGO terms, it's a frontier that has only just begun to be explored and exploited as a collectable. The LEGO fan-favourite Classic Space theme has been around since the 1970s, yet those sets have rarely been considered valuable collectables or worthwhile investments. While a mint-in-sealed-box 497 Galaxy Explorer might bring in some big money, most of the original Classic Space-themed LEGO sets were for children, with basic builds and fantasy-based designs.

The LEGO Group dabbled in more serious space-based sets with the small Discovery Channel theme in 2003. These sets were based on the accurate designs of past and present space vehicles, such as the Discovery Space Shuttle and Saturn V rocket. Most of these sets appreciated extremely well, but were never really considered major collectables by LEGO fans. Take a look at most of the major space or NASA-related sets over the past two decades, though, and one thing becomes apparent: 'real' space sells.

The recent release of 21321 International Space Station makes me

think of the more recent space-based sets, like 21104 NASA Mars Science Laboratory Curiosity Rover and 10213 Shuttle Adventure, which have also appreciated very strongly since they retired. Fast forward to today, and sets like 21309 NASA Apollo Saturn V, 10266 NASA Apollo 11 Lunar Lander and the aforementioned 21321 become potential must-have investments for the hardcore LEGO space fan, reseller and collector.

It also helps that these newer space sets are wonderful in their own right. The latest Saturn V might be one of my all-time favourite sets, and Shuttle Adventure has a special display location in my office. I am even lucky to have a store display of the Discovery set 7469 Mission to Mars. What's really special about most of these newer space sets is that

the LEGO Group packages them in stylish boxes, with informative instruction manuals recounting the history of the vehicle and event. And with that in mind, the future of

this theme is also seemingly limitless, with new vehicles being developed every year by countries and companies from around the globe. ■

ONE THING IS APPARENT: 'REAL' SPACE SELLS

SET# & NAME	YEAR	PIECES	MSRP (\$)	CURRENT VALUE (\$)	ROI %
10029 Lunar Lander	2003	453	39.99	599.00	1397%
7467 International Space Station	2003	162	14.99	300.00	1900%
7468 Saturn V Moon Mission	2003	178	19.99	211.00	955%
7469 Mission to Mars	2003	418	29.99	199.99	566%
7470 Space Shuttle Discovery STS-31	2003	828	49.99	279.99	460%
7471 Mars Exploration Rover	2003	870	89.99	481.99	435%
10213 Shuttle Adventure	2010	1204	99.99	678.99	579%
21101 Hayabusa	2012	369	49.99	249.99	400%
21104 NASA Mars Science Laboratory Curiosity Rover	2014	295	29.99	424.99	1317%
21309 NASA Apollo Saturn V	2017	1969	119.99	119.99	N/A
21312 Women of NASA	2017	231	24.99	34.99	40%
10266 NASA Apollo 11 Lunar Lander	2019	1087	99.99	99.99	N/A
21321 International Space Station	2020	864	69.99	69.99	N/A



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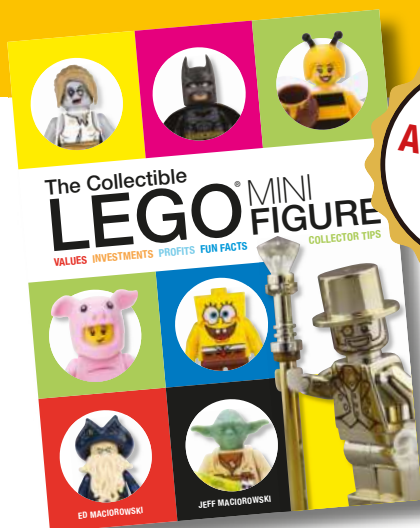


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Builder: Graham
Set: 75246 Death Star Cannon
Pieces: 159

THE Blocks REBUILD CHALLENGE

Blocks' least adept builders take on the challenge of rebuilding LEGO sets into something – anything – else, all within 15 minutes



This isn't an interesting set to begin with.

WHAT IS IT?

Firing a giant laser to destroy planets might pay well, but is it satisfying? Thanks to a mind trick from Obi-Wan, the Death Star Gunner has left his old life behind to pursue his dream and open a bar. This is LEGO Star Wars though, so he could only build it in grey.

THE BUILDING

THE TRICKIEST THING about the Rebuild Challenge is that bad builders need time to make up for their lack of skill, and for some reason we decided a 15-minute time limit was a good idea. On this occasion, though, things actually started to come together really quickly.

As I looked around for a LEGO set to dismantle, it was not hard to land on 75246 Death Star Cannon, as it isn't a great set to have on display. Straight away I put together the rudimentary Death Star, which actually represents the battle station fairly well considering it only uses a few bricks.

That led to the idea that the Death Star Gunner has left his old life behind, but I had no idea what he would be doing instead. The set contains lots of plates, so I found myself putting them together and realised it could be a beach bar-style roof. Once I decided that, the rest was fairly simple – mainly because there were so few parts to choose

from that I didn't have many choices to make.

Most of the transparent-coloured pieces in the set are supposed to represent the various drinks, with a bit of greebling at the back to give the impression of bottles and bar-related technology. Given that Obi-Wan goes for a drink at the Outlander Club, I figured he makes sense as the patron.

Even to get something as rough as this together was tough by the end, and it didn't help that I had used so many bricks for the arguably unnecessary Death Star accompaniment. The roof on the bar is really wobbly, with that random trans-red element hiding the messy and weak connection I cobbled together. As soon as I photographed it, it fell apart again.

Perhaps that's a sign that, like the Death Star Gunner's beach bar, my dream of being a capable LEGO builder is very much just a dream. ■

A cannon becomes a shack.



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